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Volume 1
Number 4
November
1950

Feature Novel

- THE WORLD-MOVER** George O. Smith 8
 Les Ackerman finds himself in a mad tangle with the inhabitants of three possible worlds, each certain that only Ackerman alone can save their existences. And to protect one world means the total atomic destruction of another and the disappearance of a third. Then Ackerman finds that he is the cause of the dilemma, only he does not know how he has brought it about!

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- THE SECRET PEOPLE** James Blish and Damon Knight 45
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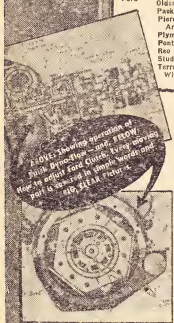


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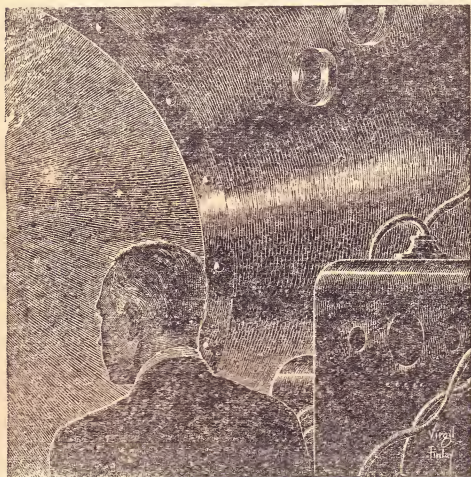
THE WORLD-MOVER

★ *Feature Novel by* ★
GEORGE O. SMITH



Les Ackerman, unbelievably alive after a nuclear explosion, finds himself sought after by the denizens of three possible worlds, all contending that Ackerman alone can adjust the incredible situation he has created. Only Les doesn't know what he's done!

Fascinated, horror-stricken, Ackerman, Laurie Blaine, and her father watched the Earth being consumed by atomic fire.



(illustration by Virgil Finlay)

TO THE present sitting, there were three hundred thousand words in the report on the new transuranic element that Les Ackerman was studying. This took months of painstaking work, but Ackerman viewed his results with satisfaction. To date, the report covered about all that was to be known regarding the physical and chemical properties of this new element; there remained only the nuclear properties to investigate.

Nuclear properties were always left to last. Nuclear bombardment defiled the element and rendered it unsuitable for the undestructive chemical analysis and physical investigations.

So Les Ackerman closed his notebook with a slam and checked the refrigerator. The deuterium-ice—frozen heavy water—for the cyclotron target was in fine shape. He could start at once.

He took both the ice-target and the sample to the big, enclosed room and inserted them in the proper places in the cyclotron set-up. Then he fired up the big cyclotron, and high-energy deuterons bombarded the deuterium-ice target, releasing free neutrons that in turn bombarded the sample.

That was to be his last job for the night; the registering counters would record the radioactivity while he slept, and in the morning the sample would probably be 'cold' enough to handle. He consulted his prospectus in the notebook and checked the bombardment-time for this first nuclear test. One half hour. At the end of one half hour, Ackerman could turn off the cyc and go to bed. The automatic counters would quietly record the diminishing activity of the 'hot' sample.

The click of the counting-rate meter sounded. The first atoms of the sample were being attacked properly. Ackerman nodded to himself, there in the operating chamber, separated from the real activity by solid yards of concrete, water, and paraffin.

Unluckily, Ackerman could not be in the cyc chamber itself to watch. As it was, it would have been no more dangerous for Les to stand in the radioactivity-laden cyclotron room than it was for him here in what all cyclotron mechanics considered more than safe from harm.

As the neutrons raced invisibly into the new element, a tiny, glistening sphere expanded, millimeter by millimeter. It was a strange field of energy, a true freak of Nature. Unpredicted and unknown, it hovered at nine centimeters radius as the sample swallowed neutrons by the uncounted million. It expanded again, slowly, slowly, slowly until the critical proportion of sample and transmuted nuclei was attained.

Then the glistening sphere of energy expanded with an acceleration that drove it to the ends of the infinite universe in a matter of microseconds. Too swift to be seen, to

register—if there had been a means of detecting it—and too swift even to leave a trace of evidence on the physical universe.

ITS EFFECT, however, was evident to Ackerman. The others who came later saw only what they found remaining. Les was on the spot, and saw the dual effect of the bombardment of Element X by neutrons.

His notebook gave the first sight of unreality. Like a double exposure, or a photomontage, he saw page after page curl up in charred destruction—curling up wraithlike out of a complete and unharmed volume! He saw the solid concrete blocks rave into incandescence—flying in terrible fury out of the unharmed wall; each brick as it exploded separating ghostlike from its unharmed twin. The laboratory exploded in a mighty pillar of flame and fire—rising seventy thousand feet into the sky but mushrooming upward from the placidly unharmed ghostly replica of itself. The light from the explosion was all-blinding, yet the calm moonlight still cast its mellow shadow over the unharmed buildings. The explosion shocked fleecy clouds into falling rain—rain that fell from the serenely existing sky of the other—other—other what?

Ackerman found himself standing on the sterile land that surrounded the laboratory, simultaneously watching the boiling cloud above and the moonlit laboratory below. He was puzzled, somewhat afraid to go close to the possible effect of the nuclear explosion; yet there was the fact that at least in one existence the laboratory was unharmed.

He waited, wondering. The passage of time did not seem to bother him. Previously, Ackerman had been tired, and more than glad that this was the last job of the evening. Now he was far from weary, and the passage of time was difficult to estimate.

He was surprised to see, not too much later, that people were stream-

ing towards the scene. He laughed at one group—a racing column of excellent fire-fighting equipment; the idea of tossing water or chemicals on a radioactive explosion was amusing in a sense. The fire had gone out a microsecond or so after it had started, and if anything were burning now, it was because the stuff had not time to cool down yet. Ackerman could think of nothing more dangerous, however, than to drive a fire truck—or anything else not shielded in lead, water, and concrete—across the scorched area.

He saw his colleagues walking wraithlike and arguing heatedly against the police and firemen. The latter wanted to go in; Ackerman's former mates were waving counters and personal ionization meters at them, trying to explain the danger. The officials were inclined to be skeptical of any danger that could not be seen, but were equally awed by the names of the men who barred their way. At long last a crude circle was drawn on the ground; as the curious folk continued to arrive, the circle was quickly filled and people were standing with their toes across the line.

ACKERMAN found one of his friends near him. "Crowley!" he called.

Tom Crowley did not hear; he continued to argue with another fellow about Ackerman.

"No," said Ackerman, "I'm here—not up in that cloud!"

"Poor Les," said Tom. "I wonder what happened."

Ed Waters shrugged sorrowfully. "I can't imagine: there was certainly nothing dangerous in what Les was intending to do."

"And we know Les," replied Tom. "He'd not take to doing something off the beam."

"There was certainly nothing off the beam about bombarding Element X with neutrons," agreed Ed Waters. "We've done it before."

"But not with as large a sample. We'll have to be careful in the future about it."

Waters grinned wolfishly. "We'll

not toss another cyclotron to the breeze," he said. "We can get a neutron-emitting radiosotope from one of the uranium piles and shove the two together by remote control; it'll save both lives and materiel."

"Too damned bad," said Crowley. "We lost a good man."

"But I'm right here!" exploded Ackerman. He had been standing between them, waving his hands in their faces—and in more than one case *through* their faces. Strangely enough, the trees and the ground were quite solid to Les Ackerman, but his friends were not.

The crowds of the curious came and they went; newspapers, as the hours went on, told Ackerman that he was the victim of a terrible atomic blast, a totally deplorable situation.

Ackerman wondered more about it. Was this death?

* * *

IT WAS MANY hours later, when daylight had come fully and the morning's work was to begin, that Les Ackerman got his next shock. The sterile area was still guarded by Ackerman's friends, making close watch with counters and ionization meters. Yet so far as Les was concerned, the shallow depression of greenish glaze fell in a concave bowl below the surface of a serene and untouched terrain upon which the wraithlike laboratory stood. He termed it "wraithlike" because he could see both the greenish depression and the laboratory, and the other side of the blast-bowl through the laboratory. He could not see through the laboratory to glimpse any of its insides.

Whatever this division was, Ackerman could see a dual possibility, could see either the world of the explosion or he could see the world of peace and quiet.

His shock came as the technicians began to arrive. Then, he blinked. As he was standing beside Ed Waters, he saw Waters' car drive up to the parking place beside the laboratory, saw Ed emerge and enter the building by the main door!

Before he could follow Waters, he saw Tom Crowley enter, too; Ackerman left their counterparts on the edge of the seared area and raced forward with a shout of alarm.

It occurred to him, then, that both men carried personal counters and warning gauges; they would have been warned away from the area if there were any radioactive danger. Ackerman found his hand passing through the door-handle and puzzled over how to get in until he understood that if his hand could pass through the doorhandle, he himself might pass through the door. He did, and with some dismay knew that he was walking, not upon the floor of the building but about a foot or so below the floor. With an effort of his will alone Les raised himself; it was disconcerting to know that he was wading knee deep through a solid concrete floor.

He found Waters and Crowley in the cyclotron room. They were looking over the sample critically with heavy magnifiers and making notes. "Thought Les was going to flop here," said Waters.

"So did I. He must have decided to go home after he was finished."

"Don't blame him. I'd have been inclined to set the timers and leave then. Ackerman is a cautious fellow and would wait until the timers clicked off even though he had nothing to do but sit and watch unerring meters. I'd say that Les deserved a good night's sleep. Well, take a hunk off of the sample for the radioisotopists, and we'll carve a bit ourselves for later, then give the remaining piece another banging."

"You carve," said Crowley. "I'll get another heavy-ice target from the refrigerator."

Waters nodded, cut two infinitesimal slices from the sample with a diamond-edged wheel, dropped them into separate containers and labelled them both. Then he re-inserted the sample in the cyclotron set-up and both men went out to give the Element X sample a second shot—ac-

cording to plan, a longer and more energetic blast.

Vainly Les Ackerman tried to reach them.

He screamed himself hoarse, trying to tell them not to do it—that he had been a one-time victim. Then, in fear and desperation, he saw them leave the cyclotron chamber; he fought and swore against his wraith-like fingers that passed through the sample of death. He clawed ineffectively at it, trying to take it from the coming blast of neutrons. Like the room, the walls, and the men, his hands passed through the cyclotron; through the sample; and through the containing shell. Instinctively he knew that the cyclotron was being fired up, yet his fumbling hands felt nothing of the fifty thousand volt driving power of the Dee plates. He knew instinctively when the storm of the deuterons came to bombard the heavy-water ice he knew that the resulting neutrons were entering the sample of Element X.

He fumed and fretted; then as his mind cried out in vain, his will slipped and Les Ackerman went down through the floor of the room, he could not reach up high enough even to touch the imminent danger.

He turned and ran, almost crying in frustration.

Near the seared edge of last night's explosion, Ackerman turned to watch. An hour passed—Two—Three.

Whatever had happened before, it was not to happen again. Not this time, at least.

For when Les returned, Waters and Crowley were watching the brief half-lives die out on the counters and making histograms in an effort to predict the safety-time.

* * *

Mystified, tired of wondering, and utterly lonesome, Les Ackerman waited in the no-world life between two direct possibilities of man's existence.

It was meaningless to Ackerman; perhaps it was meaningless to Nature herself.

The complete incongruity of it all

—and the conflicting evidences were beyond him. Trees and rock and ground were one; the building was there and so was that sere bowl of greenish glaze. At nightfall, his friends entered their cars by the laboratory and drove right through the still-crowding people of the other existence. Waters passed almost through his alter ego, and might have seen his friend Crowley twice—excepting that Waters, unlike Les Ackerman, could not see both coincident pathways of event.

2

WEARY, utterly lonesome, and completely baffled about it all, Les Ackerman finally slept. On the hard ground he slept, loath to leave the scene.

He was awakened by the sound of a voice speaking his name. Shaking his head, Les sat up, saw that it was just about sunrise, and answered instinctively, though he knew that his voice could not be heard. He could hear people—but people could not hear him; just as he could see people but they could not see him.

"I'm right here," he said for, perhaps, the ten-thousandth time. He expected, for the ten-thousandth time, that he would not be heard.

"Good," replied the voice.

Then in the growing light, Ackerman saw a glistening, egg-shaped vehicle coming slowly through the grove of trees. It hovered above him and settled easily to the ground.

The voice, he saw, came from a woman who was obviously driving the thing. There was a small hemisphere of glass thrown back from the 'top' of the vehicle, and the woman was head and shoulders above the level of the hull.

She smiled, and Ackerman was instantly attracted. "Well," she said with an air of successful finality. "You've arrived."

Ackerman shrugged. So far as he was concerned, the girl could get out of the vehicle and make passes at him; he was still as isolated from all

people as a butterfly in a glass case at some moldy museum.

"Have I?" he answered, still skeptical.

"You have." She ducked her head down into the vehicle and reappeared, coming out of a door in the side. He was a little surprised at her clothing. He expected something bizarre: at least she might have been dressed in something in keeping with the completely exotic vehicle she was driving.

But she was dressed in a simple frock of silk or nylon. Tasteful, modern. She was auburn-haired and very attractive according to Les Ackerman's fastidious standards.

"I'm Tansie Lee," she said, offering a slender hand. He took it and found it firm and warm.

"I'm Les Ack—"

"I know; after all, I've come a long way to find you."

"Mc?" asked Ackerman in complete wonder.

"You don't really know what happened?" Her tone was teasing, and she was obviously enjoying every moment of it.

"No, not really," he said. "All I know is that I was bombarding Element X with neutrons and then—well, it's rather hard to describe I can lean against a tree, but I can also walk through the laboratory door. That doesn't make sense."

"Yes it does when you're properly introduced to your environment. Look, Les, you are in the middle, lost territory between two branching streams of events. In one branch, you were the victim of an explosion; in the other, your efforts were successful in the lab.

"Now," she said, groping for the right words so that her explanation would be simple, "a tree might be in both worlds; therefore you can lean against it. If a woodcutter in one branch of events cuts the tree down, then you could walk through it in the other branch. The laboratory is there in one branch only; the green bowl of atomic explosion is there in the other Follow?"

Ackerman let that digest for a

moment and then said: "What would happen if I tried to break off a tree branch myself?"

She laughed. "You'd find—and you'll find—that things consist only of Aristotelcan extremes. Either they are non-coincident and therefore very intangible, or you'll find that they are coincident and as un-touchable as tungsten carbide to the bare hands. You can walk through non-coincident granite but you couldn't make a dent in coincident tissue paper."

"Then how do my life processes continue? Either I must be breathing coincident—and therefore un-touchable and unchangeable air—or I must be breathing non-coincident and therefore un-touchable and un-changeable air."

She laughed heartily. "Trouble is, Les Ackerman, you don't really exist; therefore your life processes are unreal."

"Oh—I don't exist, hey? Then what is this that is I?"

"I'll skip the metaphysics," she said with a laugh. "Do you doubt the reality of unreal things?"

"Isn't that a disclaimer in itself?"

SHE SHOOK her head. "The square root of minus one is an unreal number. It is a pure formulation, and yet it is an important factor. You cannot dig too deeply into any phase of science without using it—and yet it is still an imaginary quantity. It does not truly exist, nor do you. Yet it is there as a formulation, and that is what you—and I should add: I—are, or am, or whichever."

He laughed too, at her confusion. "We are," he said, but it was more of a question that a correction of her grammar.

"We are—and there are and will be others, too."

"But I do not understand it at all."

"It is not to be easily understood," said Tansie. "Not without help. I'll help, if you want."

"I'd be happy to know what the answer is," said Les. "Just how do you propose to help?"

"My machine. Take a ride?"

He nodded. "I'm hungry; have you any groceries in that thing?"

"While we're following the world line," she promised, "I'll show you that I can cook, too. Come on!"

Tansie led him cheerfully into the vehicle and closed the top-hatch. "We'll be heading into space," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Space?" he gurgled.

She nodded.

"But why?"

"In our—condition—being sort of trapped between two world lines, we are swept along in synchronism with the 'temporal advance' of the massive earth. The earth is moving through 'space'. Since we have little free 'temporal inertia', we are instantly drawn to whatever era lies in the physical mass. Follow?"

"Not too well, but it sounds like saying that if the four o'clock train arrives now, it must be four o'clock."

Tansie laughed. "We go to the 'space' where earth will be in a hundred years. Then, having no 'temporal inertia', we are drawn through time to that 'instant'... You know as well as I do that our language of words and subject-predicate sentences dissects events into artificially blocked-off units like 'time' and 'space'. But these inadequate bits of word-magic make you feel better... People not trapped in 'free time' are possessed of almost infinite 'temporal inertia' and the natural gravitational attraction between masses in the main activating force."

Ackerman nodded. "I suppose that indicates some sort of intrinsic motion?"

"Not necessarily."

"But all things are relative."

Tansie thought for a moment. "I don't understand."

"If all things are relative, then position must be."

Tansie looked blank. "I'm asking no questions," she said. "But 'time', too, must be relative. And I know that 'time' is relative to 'space', too. The entropy factors change near massive bodies. Why not 'time'? 'Time' changes with velocity, as

does mass. 'Time', mass, and velocity are all factors."

"You forgot energy. Velocity is a function of energy, which is interchangeable with mass, which affects the 'temporal strains'. The whole is one—or in less elision, they are all manifestations of one another."

Tansie smiled, stood up from the control of the ship, and beckoned with her thumb. "You're the brilliant physicist," she said. "But I'll bet I can fry a non-existent egg better than you can."

"Mind if I ask where you get these imaginary eggs?"

The girl laughed and tossed her auburn hair at him. "Real hens lay real eggs. There's two possibilities—"

"I know," he said, joining in with her good spirits. "Either we have a gang of 'time-trapped' poultry, or the art of getting 'time-trapped'—along with an icebox full of provender—takes a firm stand somewhere along the line."

"There's means," she admitted.

"Okay," he said. "You cook—and also explain to me just why you seem to think I'm the brilliant one."

"We know you are," she said; "you bear the necessary knowledge to avert disaster."

"Me?"

"You." She pointed at him with a flapjack-flipper, then used it to fracture the shell of an egg. "But no explanation of that right now; it's too consarned complicated. Wait until you learn more about it, and it'll save us all a lot of time."

"But I'm curious."

"Naturally," she said with a whimsical smile. "But I'm going to make the best of this trip, and I don't want to spend every waking hour in explanation; you'd grow tired of me."

THE SMELL of bacon and eggs permeated the place. Les lifted his face and made a show of flaring nostrils sniffing hungrily. The aroma of toast was added, to which was again the odor of butter hitting the hot toast.

"If that tastes as well as it sounds to the nose," he grinned, "I could take a lot of your company."

Tansie whirled the plate before him, placed a cup of coffee beside it. Then she sat across the table from him with her own plate and plied her knife and fork in silence.

He wondered about Tansie; she was singularly receptive to his likes and dislikes, even to the idea of not talking while he was eating. He said nothing until the coffee, and then he looked up and smiled. "That," he said, "was to the taste of Caesar."

She dropped a curtsy that was not well executed because she was not wearing the kind of skirt that makes a curtsy the sweeping genuflection it was intended for. "I render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's."

What stuck foremost in his mind was the fact that Tansie had neglected to supply sugar and cream for the coffee—which might have been a natural gesture—and he wondered whether she knew that he used neither. He did not press the question; he would let more evidence pile up before he accused her of being able to read his mind.

"You'll be interested in a look outside," she said.

"Why?"

"We're not many months ahead, so far. The trees have fallen, and greened again; yet there is sufficient non-coincident growth to make the sight somewhat bizarre."

They went to the control cabin and Tansie slowed the ship until the gray haze outside diminished and the landscape became clear again. The sight was strange. Now, instead of coincident trees, only the main branches were single. The leaves were in that 'temporal' double-exposure, since the twin worlds were beginning to lose their twinship, each following its own line of future.

"Weird," he agreed, "but I thought we'd be heading into 'space' for certain."

"We are in 'space'," she said. "So far as true 'time' is concerned. The earth is way back there." She point-

ed off vaguely in a gesture that embraced a full fifty degrees. "Trouble is that this heap wouldn't spacehop worth a tin cent in real life. But remember, we have little true inertia, and therefore a bit of propulsion does a lot of work against a minute mass. It also is less a matter of protection than convenience. You could get out now if you wanted to."

"No," he said.

"But we will stop to stretch our legs after lunch." That, too, struck Les Ackerman in the right pocket.

TANSIE HAD picked him up at about six o'clock in the morning, and the time between then and the clock's registration of noon was pleasant. The girl was brightly amusing and bafflingly vague as it pleased her fancy. She intrigued Ackerman's interest deeply, and the liking was heightened by the almost certain fact that she knew much more about the thing, but was not telling. There was time, she said. Most of the talk was light, or deliberately kept light by Tansie Lee. It went as follows, or approximately so, depending upon the subject: "But how did you find me?" he asked.

"I knew where—and when—you'd be."

"How did you know?"

"Well, for one thing, it's history."

"Yeah," he drawled, "but whose?"

"The unwritten history of the no-world," she laughed.

"Balderdash."

"Well," she said. "We do not exist; we are not really here. Therefore the history of our lives is also figmentary. It doesn't exist."

"No?"

"Nope," she said with a shake of her head. "Nothing is real."

"Then how do you read facts out of an unreal book?"

"How do you multiply a real unit by an imaginary number?"

"We do it—Oh nuts."

"Okay," she laughed. "It'll all come out in the wash. Lunch?"

"Lunch!" he said firmly.

He led her to the galley and rummaged idly into the cabinets. In one

he found a bottle that smelled inviting. "Will this," he asked, holding it up and sloshing the amber fluid in the bottle, "give we unreal people unreal hangovers?"

"It depends," she told him, opening the refrigerator and handing him a tray of ice cubes.

"Depends," he said ruminatively, busily mixing, "Upon the truth of positives and negatives. A real person with an unreal hangover might not feel it any more than I can feel an object that doesn't exist simultaneously. Similarly, we unreal people might not notice a real hangover. But if we unreal folks get unreal hangovers by drinking unreal whiskey, it might hurt. Is that it? Is that what it depends on?"

She took the proffered glass. "Nope," she said, looking at him over the rim of her glass. "It just depends—like as usual—upon how much of this stuff you think you can pack away."

They stopped after lunch, parked the vehicle in a grove of trees and went out for a walk.

"I note that things are single," said Ackerman.

"Wrong," she said. "Look again. Down."

He looked down. Down—through the hard earth to where there was another surface at least fifty miles below. Another ground-plane, dim, unreal, but like the one upon which they stood.

"Why?" he asked her.

"Your explosion was minute, as cosmic powers go. But this is many years later. The most minute deviation will make a difference in displacement after a hundred years. You, my sweet, are a Man Who Moves Worlds." The capital letters were implied by her tone, and the affectionate term seemed to come naturally.

It pleased Ackerman. Tansie was an attractive girl. She was as lost in the middle of the 'time-lines' as he was. Friendship—even love—might come swiftly under attractive isolation, but Ackerman believed that neither the isolation nor the length

of time had been great enough yet. The attractiveness was admittedly there.

And something in the back, ignored-because-it-was-unpleasant part of his mind was telling him, vainly, to watch out because this was entirely too idyllic.

ACKERMAN clapped a lid down on the malcontent thought and reached for Tansie's hand to help her up over a fallen log.

He retained her hand after help was no longer necessary; he liked it. The pleasant contact crowded out the wonder if on the other existence, miles away, had a similar fallen log.

He cast a sidelong look at her, and caught her watching him. They both stopped and faced one another.

Tansie stood there proudly, facing him, waiting. He fumbled mentally for a moment and then blurted: "Tansie, Tansie, what is all this?"

She smiled wistfully. "Not yet," she said. "It all must be. I—am not to tell you yet. And—Les—I'd prefer, even so, not to spoil it."

"Spoil it?" he exploded. "My idea is to get whatever trouble there is to be over with so that I can take the rest of whatever time there is for me to know you better."

"You'll have a lifetime," she promised. "Providing you are a completely free agent. My dear, this way I am sure of the future. One small slip, and the future is changed. You—"

"Baloney!"

Tansie took a step towards him. "Forget it." Her eyes were inviting—He looked into them; Ackerman, in thirty years of life, had never before met the girl whose eyes drew him so.

He reached for her, and Tansie came willingly into his arms. He thought briefly that Tansie could make him forget anything—and was proven right; he forgot even that.

3

SECONDS, or seven thousand years later, a rough laugh broke it up. Tansie hurled herself away from him, whirling out of his

arms. The other was facing them less than ten yards away.

"Very pretty," he said with heavy scorn. "Very pretty." He waved at them with a carbine. "So the great physicist, the hope of the civilized world, ultimate founder of the galactic empire, is found lollygagging with a broad."

"Listen—" snarled Ackerman. He lunged forward, blind with anger. The loud crack! of the rifle brought his head up, and the bullet smacked the ground between his feet.

"What's the matter?" asked the other with an oily voice. "You object to my term? Well—Tansie, you tell him."

Tansie shook her head, dazedly. "You can't say—"

"No?" snapped the other. "Well, I'll tell him, Tansie. Ackerman, your gal-friend is married."

"No—!" cried Tansie in a voice of mingled pain and terror. She was cut off by another crack of the carbine.

Tansie looked at the other man. "Calvin Blaine, you're not—"

"Ackerman is coming with me," said Blaine.

"I don't think so," Les told him.

Blaine laughed cheerfully. "You haven't much to say about this."

Les spat in the other's direction. "Don't let me get within grabbing distance of that gun," he told Blaine. Disdainfully, he turned his back and faced Tansie.

"Is it true?"

She looked at Blaine.

Blaine said, in a cold voice, "Tell him the truth, Tansie—or I'll kill him."

Ackerman turned again. "Truth?" he sneered. "Truth at the point of a gun? 'Truth' in this case is forcing Tansie to make a statement that you approve. Truth! Bah!"

Tansie looked at Ackerman, then at Blaine; this was an event she had not counted on. Tansie had believed that the history she knew—unwritten but known—was truth, despite its happening in the future respective to 'Real Time.' She had been wondering about predestination and the resulting futility of all effort;

this seemed to prove to her that this nebulous life was still subject to change at the whim of chance. But Ackerman was important, and even though his definition of truth was correct in this case, he must not be destroyed.

She looked at Blaine and then at Ackerman the collapse of all her hopes had stricken her dumb.

Tears were close to the surface. Tears for herself, for her hopes—and for Les Ackerman. Yet there was a chance. Les must not be destroyed, even at the expense of her own life; Blaine knew that, which was why he threatened Ackerman instead of her.

Calvin Blaine lifted the carbine.

Les Ackerman measured his chances and decided against them, for the moment at least.

With hidden tears stinging her eyes, Tansie Lee held up her left hand. Ackerman looked down and saw it. Very plain, very formal, as lacking in surface glitter as Tansie had seemed—Les wondered whether the simple serenity of the wedding ring was as false a cover for cheap green brass as—as—

You damned fool! he told himself. *You trebly underlined, capital-lettered idiot! A soft glance, warm lips, and an almost-invitation—and you forget yourself!*

The blind, stupid haze cleared from Ackerman's bewildered mind and he looked into Tansie Lee's face. She had been looking at him, searching his face carefully. But she had seen his expression, and was turning away. Ackerman watched her go, coldly. *A fool*, he said to himself, *is a man who makes the same mistake twice!*

Tansie walked away, her shoulders down, her warmly-rich figure gaunt, and the line and soul of dejection.

CALVIN BLAINE coughed and said: "Sorry, Ackerman. This is mostly for self-defence. I knew she'd work on you very well before I got to you—and I knew that she'd work well enough to drive you into blind fury at the first mention of her perfidy."

"I don't understand all of this," said Ackerman. His voice was hard and his attitude one of complete indifference. "What's going on, anyway?"

"You've heard of two countries, or two men fighting for their lives?"

"Yes."

"Ackerman, you started this. Unwittingly, of course. Bombardment of Element X—which we call *Temperon*—produced a freak field of force that caused a division in the universal stream of time. It has never happened before and it will never happen again according to the probabilities—no one knows what happened.

"This, Ackerman, produced a twin existence. Two probabilities that stem from a dual explosion in your laboratory. In one, there was a complete success to your work; in the other, there was total destruction of your effort. Not only did you split the world into twin existences through 'time', Ackerman, but you also split it definitely into twin camps of reasoning. Your work was based upon findings that came from countries that were enemies not many years before. Figuratively, you stood on the shoulders of scientific wisdom to prepare your manuscript of facts on the element temperon.

"Your work was an indictment of any policy that would hamstring the free interchange of ideas, concepts, work, and success. It was living proof that all men contribute to the advancement of civilization whether they be good, not so good, bad, quick, dead, friend or one-time enemy.

"The other existence, however, has your evidence that men were plodding through the uncharted seas of boundless energy and power—"

"But I was not!" stated Ackerman.

"You know that and your fellows know it. But your scientific fellows are a minority, and many of them doubt their own figures. They know only that *something* blew you and your laboratory off of the face of the earth, and they all wonder why—even those who claim to know that

you were working with nothing dangerous.

"Therefore, Ackerman, because you and your kind were obviously playing with a field of work that might cause the destruction of the universe, research is throttled and controlled to within an inch of its life. There is no leaping from an unfounded theory to cold mathematics to foregone conclusion like a fast double-play from short to second to first. To bombard a ten milligram sample of anything never before bombarded, the scientist must make ten ten-hour bombardments, adding one milligram each time."

"Well—where do I come in?" asked Ackerman.

"You have the answer to mankind's life in your brain," replied Blaine. "We need your help."

"That's about what Tansie Lee was telling me." Ackerman's mind underwent a very brief session of self-denunciation at the thought of Tansie.

"I'll show you," he said. "My ship is hard by. I'll show you, Ackerman, the destruction of a solar system by men who know too little about the stuff with which they work."

Ackerman shrugged uncertainly. "I'm not Solomon, nor even one of his seventh-assistant helpers," he said thoughtfully. "But it strikes me that there is as much danger letting everybody play with atomic fire as there is in throttling all brainwork."

Blaine laughed heartily. "Any kind of fire," he said between shouts of admiring laughter. "Even firewater! They tried complete prohibition once and people started to make everything from Allyl Acetate to xylene glycol in their cellars! No one yet has thought of legislation forcing everybody to swizzle a quart a day, and even the flushiest of luses doesn't offer drinks to kids. No, Ackerman, you're to be proven correct."

"Why?"

"That's partly why we need your help," said Blair. "People have been bootlegging science to a dangerous degree. In the other existence, people have been taking a free and untram-

melled holiday. In the future to which we're going, you'll see the answer. Men have learned the folly of fighting one another, Ackerman, but they have also learned the way across the strait of 'time'. Burning up my world by atomics will not cause their own world to die."

"Doesn't that give them both a future?"

Blaine clapped Ackerman on the shoulder and smiled sorrowfully. "They cannot cross materially," he said. "They can blast only with energy. Yet, even so, there is jealousy, hate, and malice. Remember this, Lester Ackerman: what man cannot conquer, man destroys!"

CALVIN BLAINE'S ship was about the same as Tansie's. Blaine motioned Ackerman in and followed, closing the door. From the controls, up in the pilot's deck, came a musical voice that struck a chord in Ackerman's mind: "You found him, dad?"

"My daughter," said Blaine unnecessarily. She came to meet them; a golden blonde with sparkingly mischievous eyes, upturned corners of a round, rich mouth that was also generous, and a warmly tanned skin.

"This is he, Laurie. Ackerman, my daughter, Laurie Blaine."

"How do you do, Miss Blaine."

"I do fine, usually," she told him with a laugh. "And I start at once; you are to call me Laurie; I'll eschew formality, too, and call you Les." She turned to her father. "Are we off in the planned direction?"

"We are. I succeeded in getting to them before any damage was done."

"Soon enough?" asked Laurie with a devilish glint in her eye. Ackerman squirmed uncomfortably, wishing he could duck the double entendre.

Calvin Blaine recognized the possibility of Ackerman's discomfort—possibly because Blaine was no more perfect than anyone else. He would never tell Laurie that he had interrupted a love-scene; she would never know unless Ackerman blurted it out.

He nodded negligently. "He didn't know who she was," he said.

Laurie smiled at Ackerman. "We know that Les Ackerman is a shy man," she said. "It—is becoming. But to tell you the truth, Les, I'd be worried about a bronze statue if that woman decided to hurl herself at its head." The way Laurie said "That woman" was of the same tone that one uses in describing someone who was violating the 'No Spitting' ordinance in the subway. "You're still pure and simple?" she asked him with a laugh.

"I'm simple, anyway."

"Good; I'm not too bright in some things. Dad's tried to tell me about temperon. I'm baffled; what's temperon?"

ACKERMAN took a deep breath and was frankly glad to get off of the tender subject of his affections and onto a more stable discussion of material physics.

"It's an involved yarn," said Ackerman. Back in the nineteen-thirties, a scientist by the name of Enrico Fermi was successful in bombarding almost every element with neutrons, and succeeded in most cases by raising the atomic number of most of them. The neutron, you see, enters the nucleus, making the nuclear mass too great for the nuclear charge. The nucleus then re-establishes stability over a time by emitting a beta particle, transforming, in effect, one of the neutrons to a proton. Now the top of the periodic chart is uranium, and Fermi wondered what he would get if he tried to raise the top-number."

"That was plutonium?" asked Laurie.

"Neptunium first, then plutonium. After the Second War, science took up again, investigating for the sake of learning more about their surroundings. Plutonium was top-number for not too long. Element ninety-five came next, and ninety-six followed soon. We were working on element number one hundred and forty-four; that is the one called temperon."

"There are that many elements above the former top?"

"There are, theoretically, an infi-

nite number of elements. Most of the top elements are unstable—that is, radioactive. Fissionable elements occur more and more frequently in the top brackets. No one has ever seen element one hundred and eight, you know; it fissions automatically as soon as it is made."

"How do you hurdle it, then?"

"Bombard it with deuterons, which raises the charge one number and the mass two numbers. It isn't easy, but it works." He looked at Laurie with curiosity. For an avowed lack of education in atomics, Laurie knew the proper questions to ask. He wondered whether her interest was as great or her desire for knowledge as deep as she said—or whether she were doing her best to put him at ease by leading him into talk about the subject he liked best.

Then, surprisingly, she looked him in the eye and winked with a brazen leer. She stood up and headed for the kitchen, knowing that he would follow. When he arrived, she was busily mixing drinks. He smiled. It was an excellent grade of scotch; he said so.

The drink relaxed him.

Laurie took the third drink in to her father. "Good for the soul," he said to Ackerman, lifting the glass.

"It is," he said heartily.

Then Calvin Blaine drew Ackerman's story out. Blaine was genuinely interested in the true history of the world, and enjoyed listening to Ackerman's description of the events that took place during the World War II and afterwards. "First hand telling", said Blaine; "It held cards, spades, and big casino over the books." The drinks helped Ackerman to relax, and before he knew it, the aroma of fine steak was filling the ship.

Laurie, too, was an excellent cook.

4

IT WAS, SAID Les Ackerman as he awoke, an eventful sixty hours since the eventful partial explosion on his laboratory. And in twenty six hours since Tansie Lee

had found him at six o'clock the previous morning, Les had travelled a several of hundred years and a good many millions of miles in space.

Not bad, he thought, for someone who does not exist.

He stretched and turned over for another forty winks, and was dozing when the door opened and Laurie Blaine came in with coffee, which she held temptingly under his nose until he reached for it, and then held completely out of reach.

"Come and get it," she said mischievously.

"I don't dare," he laughed.

"How will I know that you're getting up?" she asked suspiciously.

"Take my word for it; that smells like tomorrow morning."

"Well," she said brightly, "in case you're interested, this is tomorrow morning. Get up!"

"You get out and I'll get up," he told her.

Then from the doorway, Calvin called: "Better; we're not long nor far from the scene I want to show you."

"Good enough for me," replied Ackerman. "Drag that woman out of here, will you?"

"Come on, shameless wench," laughed Blaine to his daughter. "Despite your arguments, modesty is a virtue. Let the man get dressed in peace." He grinned at Les. "She'd sit there and make snide remarks about your knees," he said. "Git!" he told her.

She got. And Les was thoroughly awake and dressed in minutes.

After breakfast, Blaine took the controls himself. "We'll watch this from a distance," he said. "I've enough power to break away from the temporal inertia and attractive mass. We can see both sides of this thing, which is more than those doing it can see."

There was the feeling of lift to the vehicle. It went on for an hour, through the gray haze that pressed against the windows of the ship while they were in motion. Then, finally, Blaine turned from the controls and the haze cleared.

"I've accelerated the 'time-rate,'" he said. "Now that we're out of the earth's attractive temporal field."

"Why?"

"Destruction of anything the size of the earth takes time," explained Blair. "I've read stories in which the earth crashed into another planet, and it took place in a matter of minutes. Forgetting that at planetary velocities—earth is about seventeen miles per second orbital, if I remember correctly—it takes the earth over a minute to cover one diameter of motion. Also the chances of a real crash, like a couple of golf balls colliding is impossible."

"Roche's Limit?" asked Ackerman.

"They'd start to come apart by mutual gravitational attraction before they hit, and the resulting crash would be more like two spoonfuls of baking powder hitting one another."

"Sounds messy," said Laurie.

Ackerman looked cheerfully sour. "It would be," he told her.

"This affair is not to be that simple," stated Blaine. "No collision. Just beamed energy. Equally messy, though."

"The 'time' speed-up is obvious, isn't it?" asked Les, looking at the distant earth through the telescope. "I can definitely perceive the turning."

"We're running free at about twenty to one," said Blaine. "Earth will turn once in about an hour and twelve minutes."

"When does the big show start?"

"Any moment now."

"But where's the green hazy fog?" asked Les. "I thought—"

"That fog is only apparent when near a body like earth. It is caused by the diffraction of the air—you see, when you're moving through 'time', the speed-up of air-motion causes a complete diffraction and diffusion of all light. We're in space where there is no air."

AS BLAINE spoke, a twinkle of light burst like an exploding bomb a half diameter to the north of the earth. The speckle of light spread and diminished in intensity; it still cast a baleful but momentary glow

over the northern hemisphere—or not-quite-hemisphere because of its proximity to the earth.

"That's the beginning," said Blaine.

Minutes later, a second pinprick of energy expanded. This one was either on the surface or very close; it was hard to tell which. But the effect was terrible. A ruddy gout of multicolored smoke and flame spurted out, leaping from the point of contact. It raced up and away from the surface making a tiny tuft of fluffy smoke that looked like a wisp of cotton pulled through the cloth covering of a pillow. It was tiny compared to the size of the earth, but the shock wave that raced in a concentric circle away from the gout of energy—racing across the ground in a crawling distortion—was quite visible. Its amplitude died as it spread until it was invisible.

Minutes later, a contracting circle of shock-wave appeared. It converged and closed down on the spot that was still covered by the tiny cloud. There was considerable amplitude at that spot where all the energy returned, then the concentric shock wave raced away from the point again.

"I'd like to see the antipodes," muttered Ackerman.

"We'll see others," Blaine promised.

"That was the same shock wave, wasn't it?" Laurie wanted to know.

"Yes," said her father, watching through his telescope. "It started from that city and spread out across the earth. On the other side, of course, the thing converged to zero, passed through itself and spread out again. It returned to its origin—and will continue to encircle the earth until it dies. Each time it is less perfect because of wave-diffraction and refraction due to a non-homogenous medium. That tends to spread it out, makes its focal point imperfect. Its energy will be dissipated in heat due to resistance. It will eventually die and—"

"Here comes one!" exploded Laurie. "From the other side."

They watched. The shock wave converged, growing in amplitude as it

circled down to the pinpoint. There was a clouding at the focal point where earth itself ground itself to bits in the grip of a transmitted wave of energy. The receding wave spread out again.

Then, as though the enemy had been searching out their target—bracketing it—other pinpricks burst in widely separated places. The criss-crossing of concentric shock waves cast up high peaks that raced along, tearing up the very ground.

"On earth," said Blaine, "Nine hours have passed since the initial blast."

More time passed, and then with the target accurately bracketed, the pinpricks of energy burst again and again and again in lightning speed. The face of Terra sparkled; scintillated. The ground writhed and boiled; mighty gouts of earth and tortured stone burst upward where the bursts of power drove below the surface. The scintillating face of the earth increased to a constant glow as the ferocity of the attack increased. Moving clouds of gray and white obscured the surface, through which came the angry, flaming glow of surface bombing by high, sheer energy.

The color temperature of the cloud increased until the scintillating, ever-changing illumination changed subtly. Now the smoky, cloudy earth shone with an angry glow more bright than the individual sparkles; it was like a fog-cloud illuminated from behind. "The earth," said Blaine in an awesome voice, "is growing incandescent."

ACKERMAN took a deep breath. "And still," he sighed bitterly, "they continue!"

"They will continue, until they raise the temperature of the earth so high that the thermal energy is sufficient to exceed the escape velocity of the earth's mass. Then, driven by the power of the light-output, the earth will disperse in a cloud of streaming, incandescent gas. For," Blaine added sardonically, "as the first quantities start to leave, the mass diminishes and the escape ve-

locity diminishes also. The earth will expand in white-hot gas and disperse forever."

"Horrible," said Les Ackerman through a dry and aching throat.

He turned from the telescope and faced Calvin Blaine. "I—started this?"

Blaine nodded, but added: "Unwittingly. No fault of yours."

"Then, what can I do to avert it?"

"You must help us," said Blaine. "Will you?"

"I'll do anything. But if this is an extension of 'Time', how can the future be changed?"

"This is just a most certain probability; intervention may change it."

Ackerman sat down weakly, and was thankful for the oversized jolt of scotch that Laurie handed him. "I'm still puzzled; it seems to me that this splitting-off in 'time' must go on constantly. A tree might grow either to the left or to the right. Do not these offer different world-line endings?"

"By and large," said Blaine, "they do. But you must remember that most incidents are unimportant to the complex. We have two living possibilities due to your unfortunate accident. You see, Ackerman, it is true that a tree may grow either to the left or to the right; it does not grow both ways. When the 'time' comes for the decision to be made, the forces that work toward causing that decision have been in force for some duration and the tree takes the most logical move; therefore only one future ensues. Even in the decision of a possible dictator of all humanity, the decisions he makes are dependent upon his past experience. Grand Chance is not a matter of tossing dice; men have a free will, Ackerman. Yet their lives are fairly well cast ahead of time by the course of their pasts. The formula that caused World War II to grow out of World War I was evident enough to prevent World War III; yet in no way could Adolph Hitler have been averted because he rose out of a situation already created."

"It still sounds like predestination

—and the futility of all effort."

"Not so. You are a free will, Lester—yet your actions are conditioned by your past. By 'free will', I mean you have a choice of alternatives within the frame of conditions around you. The only ones whose actions are not dictated by solid experience are the insane. And they, even by the Ancients, were termed 'Unpredictable'."

Ackerman nodded. Once you knew a man, you could make a fair prediction of how he would react to a given set of conditions, starting no major alterations in his motives and view points, etc. Perhaps if you knew him very well, your prediction would be better. Les smiled grimly. No man knew another that well.

In fact, he admitted silently, no man knew himself well enough to predict his own reaction to an entirely unprecedented situation!

OUTSIDE, the terrible earth-glow had become intense. It was expanding like a misshapen balloon. Wispy clouds of high-energy were fingering out into space, followed shortly by the main mass as it dispersed. It was ten times the original diameter now, and increasing rapidly.

"It will take days," said Blaine. "Of our accelerated 'time'. But you know the end-point."

Ackerman knew. The end-point of this was a blank space in the solar system and a gradual re-establishment of the energy-distribution of the solar system to make up for the missing mass-energy and attraction of the destroyed earth.

"What can I do?" he asked helplessly.

"How did they hit the earth?"

"I don't know," answered Ackerman.

"They had observers, just as we are. They got here by penetrating the no-world between the world-lines as we have done. We—you—must develop a means of our doing that. You, Ackerman, are really the only one in historic time who knows the secret of temperon."

"No, I do not."

Calvin Blaine smiled tolerantly. "I

am of the destroyed earth," he said sadly. "We do not know how to penetrate the barrier."

"But you are here," said Les.

Blaine nodded very slowly. "Yes—because you, Les Ackerman, know that secret."

"But I don't—I don't!"

"You will recall it. You will work; you will succeed. And once you succeed in penetrating the secret of the barrier between the twin possibilities, you will help us. Then we will be able to come through into this temporal freedom of this unreal existence—to help you!"

Ackerman groaned. "I am the man." he said quizzically, "who travels backwards in 'time' to write himself a set of plans on how to build a 'time machine' which he is now using to deliver the letter."

"Indeed."

"And so," Laurie said, smiling, "you reach down, grasp yourself by the shoelaces, and lift."

"Ridiculous. . . But I will help!"

Calvin Blaine caught Ackerman's hand in a firm grasp. Laurie pressed his other arm against her in a gesture of real affection. Ackerman felt, within him, the beginnings of a glow of success—

And at that precise moment the ship lurched, throwing them all off balance.

5

CALVIN BLAINE cursed, strove to disentangle himself from Ackerman, who was trying to raise both his weight and that of Blaine from Laurie, who was pressed harshly across the heavy desk; its edge was cutting into her spine.

The lurch changed direction and hurled them all from the desk and across the tiny room against the wall. This time the combined weight of Laurie and Ackerman crushed Blaine to the wall, and drove the breath from him. He struggled weakly; Laurie slipped to the floor, gasping.

Ackerman, cushioned first by the girl and second by her father, was dizzy, but not harmed. Blaine slipped

to the floor as Les Ackerman stooped and lifted the girl to her feet.

Then there was a metallic, grinding sound; shortly afterwards three men strode in and snapped handcuffs over the wrists of Laurie and Calvin Blaine.

"You're lucky," one of them said to Ackerman.

"Lucky?" snorted Ackerman. "That's what he told me when he met Tansie and me."

"You're luckier this time," laughed the leader. "I'm Barry Ford. The guy with the manacles and the policeman's mein is Tod Laplane. He who fondles the firearm is a trigger by the name of Louis Ford. He is fortunate enough to share the same parents with me."

Louis grinned cheerfully. "Sharing a fine set of parents has but one drawback," he told Ackerman. "It requires that I acknowledge Barry as my blood brother. It shouldn't happen to a salamander, let alone a dog."

Barry smiled genially. "Well," he said, "you're luckier—and have always been in better company—than I am—and have been."

Laplane turned away from his handiwork. "Shall it be pistols and coffee at daybreak?" he laughed.

"Look," said Ackerman, interested in the horseplay but annoyed by the entire occurrence, "Suppose you jokers forget your unreal animosities and tell me what's going on."

"All's fair—" said Barry Ford.

"—In love and war," finished his brother Louis.

"Is that what this is?" demanded Ackerman.

"By and large," agreed Barry. "You've just witnessed the destruction of a world; their world," he added, pointing at Laurie and Calvin Blaine. "That, I must admit, was engineered by our world." To the latter word Barry added the gesture of pointing to his brother and the other man, Laplane.

"It was not a pretty sight," snapped Ackerman; "are you going to try to justify it?"

Blaine grunted angrily. "No one can justify wanton destruction.

"Remember, Ackerman, that what you have just observed is but a close probability. Believe this because we cannot prove it right now—we will later—but we have as interesting a scene to show you concerning our world. Engineered, I might say, by Blaine and his very lovely daughter."

"He told me that I was the man who could avert that affair."

"Uh-huh," grinned Barry wolfishly. "You are. You were well on the way to averting it. Look, Ackerman, how long do you think this unnatural splitting of the 'time stream' can continue?"

"I don't know."

"Well, not much longer. This unreal 'time-space' comes to an end not far from here, Ackerman. The ending of 'time-space'—this unreal existence between two probabilities ends; and he who lets the normal passage of 'time' catch up with him is, at the end of this 'time-space', trapped in the natural world. That is the 'future' and will always be the 'future' to those of us who roam this 'time-space' in the hope of averting the tragedy. When we all have succeeded, we will all come to the end of 'time-space', here and not long hence, and permit ourselves to be caught up with the natural pattern of life. Your friends here—my enemies—were about to accomplish their purpose."

"Purpose?" said Ackerman trying to follow the other man's reasoning. "Is it a foul purpose to try to prevent the death of a world?"

FORD NODDED. "You, Ackerman, are destined to save the situation. Blaine and Blaine, here, were about to permit you—with them—to be caught up with the ending of this 'time-space'. Then the brilliant Lester Ackerman would be lost to 'time-space' forever. The real tragedy would come, but the minor tragedy that only they consider worthy, would have been averted. So long as you remain in 'time-space', Ackerman, the destruction of their earth is a definite probability."

"Sounds like a good reason for leaving."

"Yes? Then listen: So long as you remain in 'time-space' the destruction of my world is improbable."

Calvin Blaine glared, and he spoke up. "Ackerman, what he says is true, in part; because he intends to use you to develop a means of destroying my world. If you pass into the future, our own scientists will succeed first and therefore be able to destroy his world."

"You're in the middle," said Laurie in a sympathetic voice. "No matter which you do, you've got the fate of a world on your head. I believe," she added wistfully, through welling eyes, "that I might have been able to make you forget that. In fact, had it been mine to say, you'd have been spared knowing that upon your shoulders lies the decision as to which existence should be saved. It is a question that no mortal should ever be called upon to decide."

"Come," said Barry Ford to Ackerman. He ignored the girl's plea. "We've got to get out and into our own ship. This one is drifting toward the end of 'time-space'; we'll be caught."

"Even now," said Laurie in a voice that wrenched Ackerman's heart, "I could ease the hurt; make you forget that such a problem once was yours. He'll leave us to drift, Les. We'll be caught and taken from this life. If you decide—please come. To—me?"

Barry turned roughly and snapped: "You'd sell yourself for your world?"

"It would not be a difficult sale," she answered.

"But a bargain hard to keep pure," he snorted.

Laurie smiled. "It often happens," she said with a ring of sincerity, "that duty and logic both direct one toward his heart's desire; that's when life is best."

"And you?" Barry scowled.

"I find neither duty nor logic to be odious terms," she said; "and I'm not one to abandon a pleasant idea just because it isn't original with me."

Louis Ford suddenly jumped. "Hurry!" he shouted. "She's stalled us to the danger point!"

"Trickstress," scorned Barry.

"They lie!" screamed Laurie. "Lester—believe me!"

Calvin Blaine turned to her. "Les will do as *he* believes," he said. "And all is not lost. We may yet win; remember—this, too, if but probability!"

Louis Ford and Tod Laplane grabbed Les Ackerman by the arms and hurried from the ship, into theirs. Les heard Laurie's fading voice crying through sobs for him to stay.

THE DOOR of the other ship rapped shut and cut off the cries. "A consummate actress," said Barry levelly.

Ackerman turned to him. "I presume that Tansie Lee is one of your crowd? Frankly, I really don't know who to believe."

Barry laughed shortly. "Tansie Lee? She is none of my crowd; she's a weak-minded sitter on the temporal fence, Ackerman. She believes that both worlds can be saved."

"Well, can't they?"

"Oh, now look, Ackerman, you're not the same kind of wishy-washy creature. Life is a struggle always. Kill or be killed still works—and always will."

"Just destruction for the sake of," said Ackerman harshly, "is untenable—even though you indulge in self-justification by believing that life is always kill or be killed."

"Let's face it," said Barry Ford. "Before your perilous experiment, we had a single world, with a single 'future'. You caused fission of 'time'. The twin existences are starting to converge again; the energy used in splitting 'time' is dissipating and as it is converted, the 'time-streams' converge. But they have not been the same world for hundreds of years. What will happen when suddenly the solar system contains two suns, two earths, and two of each planet? The sky will be filled with double stars where single stars once were, and quadruple stars where doubles now exist. Some, that have not moved far from one another in their contingent existences, will find one another occupying the same 'space'! See?"

Ackerman scowled uncertainly. "It looks to me as though we're scheduled for a big blast anyway."

Ford shook his head with a slight smile. "Nope," he said. "Not at all; you see, Ackerman, there is only one thing that tends to draw the coincident existences together. One force against the fissioning force of your little experiment. If we can destroy that force, the twin lives will continue to drift apart."

"And that force?"

"That force, Ackerman, is the physical energy of the human mind!"

"Uncontrolled? What is the affinity?"

Barry bit his lip and shrugged. "Human cussedness," he said. "Why, fundamentally, are you a brilliant physicist?"

"I'm not; and I've been called that by too many people."

"You are and we'll pursue the question. Why?"

Ackerman grinned. "Just apelike curiosity," he said. "I like to know what makes things tick."

"Research," said Barry, "revealed to our world that this 'time-split' did obtain. It was announced. Instantly all people began to wonder what the other one looked like, whether he had a 'time-brother' on the other one, and every man, woman, and child found himself hoping, someday, to join the other world. Doubtless those of the other earth did likewise."

Ackerman nodded absently. "You can destroy the earth but you can't change human nature, is that it?"

"With precision."

ACKERMAN thought for a moment. Then he said: "I'm in the middle; I've been told by three groups that within my mind lies the hope of salvation. That may be so, but where it lies I'll be unable to tell until someone tells me. Maybe I'll meet myself here in 'time-space'. Then perhaps I can tell me." He laughed bitterly.

"However," he said roughly, "I'm still in the middle. I've been led around both by the nose and by emotions and logic that may be correct—or sheer sophistry. Someone should haul off and tell me the truth, the

whole truth, and nothing but; too many people seem to be keeping things to themselves. Like the gang who is afraid to vote for a square deal because a square deal means that they'd get what was coming to them and they know they wouldn't like what they deserved.

"Everyone seems more than willing to make use of me to further their own ends. I'm still in the middle because I don't know the whole story.

"However again," he said with a sour smile, "there is one item upon which all warring groups agree. And that, gentlemen, is that Lester Ackerman's mind contains the answer to the problem. Until I know what the answer is, I'm unable to help friend or foe, or in between. Nor," he added, "do I know which is which, yet.

"Therefore," he finished, "I'll go along with you because you happen to have captured the pawn in free gambit; perhaps I'll learn the answer to all of my questions at the same time."

Barry and Louis Ford and Tod Laplane listened quietly. Then Barry nodded. "You've been pulled this way and that way, Ackerman, because you were unable to move on your own; it is an admission of weakness to refuse the other side its due. It is an admission of strength, belief in one's own ideals, and faith in the rightness of himself if he is not only willing for the other side to be heard, but urges it. Well, Ackerman, we think we're right and we'll take you at your word; we have every reason to believe that our side of this complicated story is the soundest."

"Then how do I start?"

Barry smiled. "We all need a means of entering 'time-space' from a real existence; you are the only one able to do it so far."

"But you're here."

"We are—but excellent probabilities; we are proof that you succeeded. You might fail, Ackerman, and then our life would remain on our individual worlds. Our life here will fade and all we've been able to do will also disappear."

"And me?" asked Les, puzzling. "Am I a real identity, wandering through an unreal realm of fancy?"

"This is an unreal world," said Barry thoughtfully. "Therefore you must be unreal, too. However, if you fail, it will be as though you died in that explosion. If you succeed, you will live again. With us!"

6

BARRY FORD, unlike Les Ackerman's other companions, was set up for work. Tansie had wanted to show him first and explain afterwards; what her real purpose was, Les Ackerman could not divine. He suspected her motives deeply; after all, Tansie was a married woman by her own admission, a fact she had not mentioned until it had been forced from her. Not only that, but she had behaved like a woman who was not only interested in him but who also wanted his interest in her. Ackerman squirmed uncomfortably as he recalled his complete, doglike faith. He'd missed the ring; it was small and of natural gold that blended with Tansie's golden skin. He suspected that she had been careful to keep her left hand either out of sight or in motion, so that he could not see it.

The Blaines at least, were more straightforward; there was less mystery to them. Or, he admitted, their purpose had been uncovered by Barry Ford and Company. At least there seemed to be no perfidy there. Laurie was justified in trying to save her own earth. It was a rather involved question; one that might never be solved. Ackerman might never be sure whether Laurie's interest was real. Saving a world was a large item, one that might drive a person into most any devious act. He had no doubt that Laurie was a consummate actress, as Barry Ford claimed. Calvin Blaine was equally justified. Ackerman smiled grimly. He saw no reason to vote for one against the other; he did not subscribe to their policy, which was to

save their own at whatever expense to any other, yet he was firm in his own willingness to admit that they were justified in their own minds. Placed in a similar position, Ackerman knew that he would lie, cheat, and steal to save his own earth from destruction.

But things were clearer. Ackerman held no illusions now. He pegged Barry Ford right. Ford, of course, was smart; he knew that by this time there could be little chance for blind leading. His sensible course was to admit the conflict and ask Ackerman to view both sides before acting. Also, grinned Ackerman, Barry Ford was smart enough to realize that after having two women hurled at him, Les would be inclined to view any other such acts as sheer folly. The adage said: Once burned, twice shy. After twice scorched, how skittish for the third time?

He had completed the circle of thought; he was back to Barry Ford. The third party in this wild game was, unlike the others, set up for laboratory investigation; Les admitted once that he did not know about Tansie Lee and the Blaines. Maybe they were also set up. He hadn't been around that long.

Les Ackerman was beginning to understand the basis for the famed General Semantics. It was fine to know what was "truth", or feasible, or "good". It was even better to know what was not "truth", or "good", or feasible; that implied a greater recognition of knowledge. Thomas Edison was reported to have known several thousand things about his nickel storage battery that would not work.

The trouble with Ackerman, he himself realized, was that he knew nothing at all. It was an insane program; he was here, aided and working for men who were able to get here because Les had been successful in his work. And then they blithely stated, coldly and calmly, that so soon as he proved himself unable to succeed, they would all disappear!

He shook his head, and then

grinned. Fervently he prayed that this was not a wild dream; it was such a fearful mess that any waking would be a sorry anticlimax. He recalled Doctor Forbes, the eminent psychiatrist, who once said that there was absolutely no way to prove to one's own satisfaction that he was either dreaming or awake. He remembered that especially because he'd had a dream shortly afterwards in which he dreamed that he had just awakened from a dream. Doctor Forbes had nodded when told, had mentioned that his subconscious had used that method to try to prove to his dreaming mind that the dream was real.

He stopped thinking along those lines. That way madness lay. It was reminiscent of the childlike reasoning that asks: "But Daddy, who brings the baby storks?"

Or, he reconsidered irrelevantly, how many angels can stand on the point of a pin.

THERE WAS another, more pertinent thing. On that point, Ackerman left his room and went to Barry Ford. "Look, Barry," he said. "I want to know how you got here."

"You brought us through."

"And where is the equipment I used?"

Barry shook his head. "I don't know right now."

"And I suppose that the Blaines came likewise?"

Barry nodded.

Les Ackerman shook his head. "I've been shoved around, so much that I see little reason in bringing this gang through so that you can all shove me around. I'd like to go back myself."

"You can never go back," said Barry, sincerely. "And you'll find that living in this 'time-space' is not the bed of roses it might seem. It gets goddam lonesome. You'll get wild for the touch of an honest whim. We bring through only what we plan ahead for; you must plan every item, Ackerman, which leaves the chance-factor of living completely out. There is no getting up in the middle of the night to take a run

to the corner drugstore for a cup of coffee. Or calling up your girl for a quick date as a pleasant surprise. If you hope to do something like that, you've got to plan it ahead and say to yourself: *'On the seventieth evening in 'time-space', I shall surprise my beloved by presenting her with—something very unperishable.'* I'm sorry that I cannot help you, Ackerman."

"You might have brought the equipment through with you."

"Or a model? No go, Ackerman; the thing isn't like a radio set or a small cyclotron. It's more a matter of force fields and energy gradients, as I too-vaguely understand it."

"Why didn't anybody think to ship through a physicist?"

Ford snapped the communicator on and called: "Fellows, come here, all of you!"

Louis Ford came first, and Tod Laplane. Then a striking brunette that Ackerman had not seen before—and for whom Barry said, quickly: "This is Tod's sister Joan; she's here as a general statistician and recorder, and not for the purpose of enticing you."

"That's not very complimentary to either of us," said Ackerman.

Joan smiled honestly. "No, it isn't. But it is true, Lester. You see, I'm a gatherer of facts; I know how people have been trying to use you. I promise—we will not."

Tod smiled at her and then asked: "Why the general call, Barry?"

Barry grinned. He gave them a brief resume of the talk and discussion, and Ackerman's questions of why it couldn't be done by copying the models used to bring them through. Then, with a flourish and a beautifully executed counterfeit of Lester Ackerman's voice, tone, and diction, said: "Why didn't anybody think to ship through a physicist?"

Laughter rang through the ship. Barry himself broke down and leaned weakly against the desk. Tod Laplane fell inert into a chair and shook with gales of silent laughter. Louis Ford merely gulped inanely,

and Joan added her mirth in a gurgling contralto.

"Okay," snapped Ackerman, "so soon as I find the face I dropped here somewhere, I'll leave."

That stopped the laughter. "Look, Ackerman, you're the great physicist; why should we have another?"

Ackerman snorted. "The next character who calls me a 'great physicist' either with or without capital letters is going to get a mouthful of fist," he snarled; "I'm tired of being the main point in a joke."

Barry sobered quickly. "It is not used in a sense of ridicule or insult."

"I don't give a damn how it is used. I don't like a lot of people calling me a veritable messiah. I'd not like it even if their tongues weren't shoved eight miles out in their cheeks. So stop it, unless you'd like to go a few swift ones with me."

Barry nodded. "Sorry, Ackerman. But—you understand—we know you brought us here. Within your own mind and your own ability, you have the secret to the big question."

"About all I know about the physics of this business is that it started with a few grams of temperon."

"We'll get you some temperon," said Barry. "And a cyclotron. And most anything else you're likely to need."

"Good," snorted Ackerman. "Get me a lie detector; eight gallons of scopolomaine; and a psychiatrist—and have 'em comb my mind. Frankly, I'd like to know the answer, too."

* * *

ACKERMAN settled for the cyclotron and the temperon. He spent a week of trying, but little came of it, according to him. Barry Ford had come well prepared. The mass spectrograph was a beauty; the cyclotron was a physicist's dream; and the physico-chemical laboratory must have set someone back a cold half billion.

And to top it all, Ackerman had been the mainspring that brought it through, and was now trying to figure out how and why.

He learned more about the nuclear properties of temperon. They were nothing to get excited about, or he considered them normal until the statistician-girl, Joan Laplane looked up from her notes and asked, innocently: "Temperon is stable. The neutron-isotope—making it the next atom-number above, is radioactive. But I note that it is doubly radioactive."

"It is. It either emits an alpha particle and drops two numbers and four masses down, or emits a beta ray and jumps a number up with no change in mass. In the first case the resultant is stable. In the second case, the resultant then emits an alpha particle and an electron and becomes stable—the same element."

"But why should it emit one of two particles?"

"That's a normal state for many radioactives," said Ackerman. "Radioactivity is a sign of atomic instability. The ejection of the unbalancing particle is not instantaneous. It takes 'time'. In the meantime, the nucleus is unbalanced. Now, this unbalance energy is distributed among the particles of the nucleus, and depending whether the alpha collects the necessary energy first or whether the random rambling of this energy drives out a beta ray, we have the splitting of the radioactive ladder. It happens, for instance, in all three of the normal radioactive chains: Thorium, actinium, and uranium. Thorium drops down the scale normally, dropping alpha particles and beta rays until it reaches Thorium C, which is an isotope of bismuth—bismuth 212. There it splits into Thorium C' or Thorium C''. Thorium C' emits alpha and becomes lead 208; Thorium C'' emits a beta ray and—like-wise—becomes lead 208."

"Might it mean an unknown structure of the nucleus?" she asked.

"Might," he said reflectively. "There's isotopes—elements with the same atomic number but different masses. There's isobars—elements with the same atomic masses but different numbers. Maybe there's

you-name-it-bars with similar masses and numbers but different structures."

"Different meson activity."

"Mesobars?" he laughed; "I'll buy that." It intrigued him, and he went on: "Maybe temperon, in splitting into two different possible atoms produces a situation whereby the reactions between the two elements results in something new in nuclear physics."

Barry Ford looked up and said: "I could see that it might be messy if Element X fissioned into radioiodine and radiophosphorus."

"Not phenomenally so," replied Ackerman, shaking his head. "A few atoms of explosive chemical mixture is still small peanuts to the energy of a radioisotope, let alone a true fission. And the resulting chemical combination still has the radioisotopes in it which will emit and change. Chemical combination of an atom of hydrocarbon and oxygen produces a few electron volts. Alpha from any radioisotope runs into millions of electron volts."

"Um. Well, what have you got?"

"I don't know," said Ackerman; "I've got to think."

He stood up and stretched, and said he was going for a walk. Idly, he hefted the bombarded temperon on his fingers and then dropped it into a side pocket. He turned and left the laboratory.

IT WAS ON earth, of course, set in the backhills of Wisconsin, several miles from Ladysmith. Ackerman wanted to roam the roadways, and possibly gaze upon one of the handy lakes and wish fervently that he was not trapped in a no-world where he could do nothing but fume.

A car came up behind him, and he stopped to watch. It was not a phantom car of the real world, but a 'time-space' car of his unreal existence. Joan Laplane leaned out. "Ride," she stated; "gets farther and leaves energy to enjoy whatever you're seeking."

"Okay," he said. "What I want to do, I guess, is to ride through a city and watch people."

"That's masochism," she told him. "Perhaps," he nodded. "But its also a matter of frustration; I'll ride if you'll drive this hickey through traffic."

"Right through," she said with a cheerful laugh.

It was rather hair-raising, to Les. The girl drove well, but downright recklessly. That is, until he remembered that they could drive through any other car in motion.

Joan Laplane drove through other cars to pass them, and at one time she enjoyed driving on the left side of the road through a careening coupe that was racing towards them. It gave Ackerman a thrill and, in a sense, helped him to relax.

Then they were in the town of Ladysmith, a minute metropolis of about ten thousand people, but large enough in relation to the other towns in the vicinity to be the county seat. Joan brazenly selected a fine parking place in between two *No Parking* signs in front of the city hall, and backed her car through the cars of two of the local politicians who were nepotically disregarding the signs.

"That'll show 'em," she said with a grin.

"Why stop?"

"I want to dance," she told him. "We'll not pay entry, nor can we buy a drink. But we can use their floor and we can dance right through the other customers and never get an elbow in the ribs."

Ackerman laughed. This 'time-space' had some advantages. "But if your feet get trampled, I can't blame some clumsy-footed stranger."

Joan nodded, and her raven hair rippled tantalizingly. "Nope," she said, "you can't; so if you dance on my feet I'll bark your shin with a spike heel. Fair enough?"

"Fair," he said.

girl, past the headwaiter, and into the clubroom. "First time," said Joan, "that anybody has ever got into a jernt like this without paying well for the privilege."

"It has its disadvantages," said Ackerman; "we get no table."

"That's easy," laughed Joan. She led Les across the dancefloor and seated herself on the edge of the bandstand, sitting right through the saxophone player's music stand. Ackerman sat beside her, his shoulder partway through the cornetist's knee. It was sometime later that they both noticed that they were not really sitting on the bandstand but upon something as firm at least three inches below the floor-level. It was, he was beginning to understand, a matter of temporal mass and temporal inertia—which Ackerman associated with permanence, dependability, and ponderosity. The earth was quite permanent; it had been a functioning factor for a good many billion years. The building was more or less permanent, but far from having the permanence of a brick wall, for instance.

The music started and they danced; it was fun even though their feet moved ankle deep in the floor. The floor, of course, was polished and waxed. They were dancing on something that was less slick, but the matter of dancing in itself was enjoyable enough to reduce all discomfort to a minimum.

"I'd still like to order a drink," said Ackerman.

Joan shook her head. "I haven't a flask," she told him. Her statement was unnecessary. Her grandmother might have been able to conceal several quarts in and among the voluminosity of clothing. Joan Laplane, like most of the other girls of her day, would have been baffled to conceal a fluid ounce unless internally.

Liquor was not really necessary; Ackerman enjoyed himself. Joan was an excellent dancer and she was willingly lissome in his arms. She attracted him, and he was rapt in the enjoyment of the moment; so rapt that he noticed but gave no

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WITH SMILES of mutual amusement, Joan and Les walked through the door of a small nightclub, past the hatchcheck

thought to the tickling movement against his hip.

It was neither annoying nor pleasant; it was easily ignored. Whatever it might be, it could wait.

But as they moved across the phantom dancefloor, the tickling motion increased slowly, raising its violence by degrees until it was no longer something to be put aside.

Ackerman gave it thought, then. It was, as he had subconsciously known all along, the sample of temperon. It was, inexplicably, moving.

Ackerman watched it carefully, after that. He said nothing. Luckily, Joan Laplane was the kind of girl who dances silently, enjoying the silent communion of musical and physical pleasure. Therefore she did not notice that Lester's attention was directed more toward something else. Ackerman was glad that his dancing was good enough to perform without complete attention, otherwise he would not be able to keep his secret.

It—increased.

He noted it, smiled, and deliberately steered Joan and himself through another dancing couple. It was one way to make the desired test—to prove what he was beginning to suspect.

It had the desired result, but the aftermath was astounding.

The girl of the couple through which Ackerman had passed suddenly squirmed, stopped dancing. Ackerman steered Joan four quick steps away and made a graceful but swift turn so that he could look over her shoulder.

THE OTHER girl turned, took a quick bead on the man dancing behind her, and let him have the flat of her hand across his face.

At that instant, the music died in a cacophony and the chattering of the crowd died with it.

"Get fresh!" snapped the girl.

"What did I do?" asked the dumfounded man, rubbing his face.

The girl let him have her other hand on the other side of his face. "That'll tell you!" screamed the girl

in a voice that would have awed Medusa the Gorgon.

Her escort, puzzled, stepped forward between the other two. "What's going on?"

"I don't know," answered the slapped one; "all of a sudden she ups and cracks me."

"Must've been a reason," snarled the man. "Out with it!"

The slapped-one's girl friend faced the insulted girl. "Free with your hands, aren't you, dearie?"

"So's he!" she snapped in return.

"So'm I!" screeched the other girl. She reached and came back with a handful of hair. The other girl raked four red furrows down the side of the hair-puller's cheek, and the battle was on.

"Get her out!" snapped the slapped man.

"G'wan," snarled the other fellow; he led with a right, crossed with a left, and was jolted with a short jab to the stomach.

That was the end. Waiters, bouncers, and general huskies converged. The orchestra leader rapped and the band started to play a Spike Jones arrangement of *After the Brawl was Over*!

"Wisconsin," chuckled Les, "Seems to offer everything!"

To Joan, the sentimental spell was broken: Ackerman sensed this, and took her by the arm, leading her towards the door. She went, chuckling over the incident. It was Ackerman who was slightly horrified; he knew that he had been the cause of the ruckus. He was also pleased at the results, and he believed that he might be able to do something with this strange element.

He found passing through the door slightly difficult. The temperon sample in his pocket was slowed, as though a slight resistance were offered. The outer door moved slightly as he passed through it.

Joan, unknowing, drove home in the same reckless fashion. Ackerman prayed that they would meet no more careening cars; he was afraid that he might lose the sample if it caught in a swiftly moving body. This time, luck was with him.

LES ACKERMAN viewed his handiwork a week later. "'tis a real monkey-motion," he told himself, "but it should work."

It was a real Rube Goldberg, of the type often concocted for an especial test. Many kinds may be seen in any laboratory, working madly to life-test various operating members, dropping parts against steel plates to see how many bumps they will take before becoming useless.

The was similar, but adapted to a singular purpose.

It was a straight reciprocating motion that passed an arm containing the sample of temperon back and forth through the trunk of a tree. The tree, of course, was in 'Real Time'; the machine in the 'time-space'. It would have simplified things if the tree-trunk could be fastened to, but it was not; so the amount of drag was measured by the forces—back-forces—that tended to resist the motor that drove the gadget. At the end of each stroke, the arm entered a chamber that carried a radioactivity counter.

The tree was five or six miles from the laboratory, and only Ackerman knew where it was.

Ackerman, having been twice bitten, was thrice shy times ten. At this point, his own mother might have had trouble in convincing Ackerman that she meant only for his benefit.

At the end of another week, Ackerman was satisfied; he was certain. For the drag versus 'time' had passed through a wide peak. The radioactivity versus 'time' had been harder to unravel, for it possessed an irregular curve that Ackerman fought with for hours before it resolved sensibly into the superposition of several normal radioactivity curves.

The matching of the drag curve with one of the radio curves was simple, after that. And Les then spent another ten days figuring out which of the many resulting radioisotopes of temperon was responsible for its extension through the barrier

of time into the world of 'Real Existence'.

His progress after that was rapid. Barry, Louis, Tod and Joan were baffled by his actions and said so. They did see progress, and were pleased.

But they could offer no help. What Les was doing with the temperon sample was enigmatic to them, though he admitted that what they saw might lead them to the right answer eventually. A savage, given the knowledge only of the identification of materials and the working model, could easily reproduce a simple radio receiving set, yet he would have no idea as to the principles underlying the art. And many millions of people drive automobiles daily without the vaguest idea of the theory of the internal combustion engine.

The gloves that Ackerman made, studded with thin slices of temperon, enabled him to move and handle objects in the world of reality. Then the machine—with its huge paraboloidal reflector coated on the inside with a thin layer of temperon—gave Lester Ackerman his initial taste of success.

BUT IN THE forest, far from the laboratory, Ackerman focussed the reflector on a log, lying ghostlike in the world of 'Real Time'. It came through. Not as an object might be passed or drawn through a curtain to drop on the inside, or as an object lifted from a pool of water, passing from one medium to the other. It merely solidified.

He picked it up, grunting with the effort, and passed one end through a tree. Satisfied, he dropped it from his shoulder.

He turned—and then turned again, startled. His ears perked, and the sound came again.

Looking through the trees—it was like trying to see through a heavy maze of plate glass, and the scene fifty yards from him was as hidden as if the woods had been truly solid.

"Don't be alarmed," said a voice. Ackerman straightened.

"Spying?"

"You've been successful, we see," replied Barry Ford, ignoring his accusation.

"So?" demanded Ackerman.

"I might point out that you happen to be working for us."

"Interesting. I have other ideas," returned Ackerman testily. "Since I happen to be responsible for all of you, I happen to think that I have the right to do as I damn well please."

While speaking, Ackerman had been remembering that he had no freedom. He would have preferred to work alone. And if this decision was to rest as it seemed upon him, he should be permitted to make his decision unaided—or untrammelled. The idea of trying to select which one of two worlds had a better right to the future was no problem to ponder while being badgered.

Furthermore, this outfit had little more to offer than the Blaines.

Ackerman nodded inwardly, then turned the projector and snapped the reversing switch.

Barry leaped forward. His brother Louis shouted angrily. Tod Laplane lifted his gun, and Joan cried out in alarm. Tod Laplane fired, aiming for the heart of Ackerman's projector.

The bullet—passed through.

Then the Laplane-Ford faction, wraithlike already, faded from view, leaving Ackerman alone.

A LONE? NOT quite. Ackerman had another watcher, who now came into view. "Very interesting," said Calvin Blaine. "But I fear that you have done that which will cause the destruction of my world, young man."

"How?" demanded Ackerman. "And I thought that you and Laurie were trapped at the edge of time-space."

"You know my daughter?" asked Calvin Blaine in surprise. He called out, and Laurie came into view. "He knows you," said Calvin.

"Who is he. Is he Lester Ackerman?"

Ackerman put hands on hips and stared. "I am Les Ackerman," he

said; "and this is beyond me."

"It is beyond me, too," said Calvin. "However, the destruction of my world is not a pleasant contemplation, Ackerman."

"I know; I've seen it."

"You have?"

"Yes," said Ackerman. "You showed it to me."

"No such thing," replied Laurie.

"But we will, if you like."

Ackerman began to catch on. "You may, eventually," he said with a cryptic grin. "But tell me, how is my sending them back into their own world going to be instrumental in destroying yours?"

"Theirs is the world of free research," said Blaine. "Up to now, they know little of the true state of affairs, but once they return with the information, there will be trouble."

"I gather that if I'd kept them here, the initial knowledge would never reach that world?"

"You aren't properly acquainted with the chronological factors involved with the conservation of matter and energy," said Blaine. "When you sent them back, you sent them back to the precise instant of their leaving. In that way and in that way alone can the 'Real Time' constancy be preserved. This 'time-space' state is unreal, and therefore most anything can happen here. But they will return complete with all the knowledge they need to start the destruction of my world."

"Then," said Ackerman, "I shall stop them."

"You have 'time'," said Blaine. "But first, tell me how you happen to know of us."

Ackerman explained his actions up to the point of his meeting with Tansie. At that point, both Blaines exploded: "Tansie Lee!"

"Know her?" asked Ackerman quietly.

"She is a rather headstrong woman," said Blaine. "Full of a rather pale, idealistic plan to save both worlds with danger to none."

Laurie eyed Ackerman with interest. "You know her?"

Ackerman nodded glumly.

"Interesting," replied Laurie. "Imagine a real man who knows Tansie Lee without becoming captivated by her rather lush charm."

"I don't go in for running around with married women," said Ackerman.

"You're not married?"

"No," he said.

Calvin interrupted what was getting uncomfortable to Ackerman. "What happened then?" he asked. Les explained the rest, but omitted the minute details of his interrupted lovescene. He did tell them—by way of explanation—that his being in the company of Tansie Lee was due to the fact that he did not know she was married.

"I'm beginning to understand," said Blaine.

Ackerman nodded. "Go ahead," he said. "But be careful."

Laurie looked puzzled. "I don't get it."

Calvin turned to his daughter. "We've got to hurry," he said; "we've got to meet Lester Ackerman and Tansie Lee, take Ackerman to the edge of time to see the destruction of our world."

"Then it is to be destroyed?" said Laurie fearfully.

"It is only an excellent probability," said her father. "That may—it please God—be averted. Come."

8

ACKERMAN ran to the laboratory and climbed into another "time-vehicle". He drove it through "time" and "space" as fast as he could, returning to the forest area where he had sent the group back. Once there, he pursued a blind train forward in "time", hurrying to catch them.

Swiftly he moved, but as fast as he was, they were always lost ahead of him. In effect, their return was instantaneous, but so was his flight across the years. It was only to Ackerman that "time" seemed to hang heavily as he drove futureward, stopping at regular intervals to see

through the gray haze that covered up the outside when the vehicle was in motion.

At long last he saw them, but only for an instant and then through a fading fog.

Again he saw them, hurried ahead of them and waited. They reappeared in the same postures of their leaving, were present for a bare instant, and then were gone again.

There were houses there the next "time", houses and people that got in his way; the next "time" again, there was a village, and then a small city was there.

But the returning group were slowing, and Ackerman saw that they were changing their posture a bit. The looks of anger and fear were dying; tenseness was leaving their bodies; they were turning to face one another.

It was upon the next "time" that Ackerman snapped his projector at them. He might as well have snapped his fingers; nothing happened.

He wondered, then smiled in frustration. How could he bring an object in from the other world that was not there? He could not; he could but wait until they returned and then grab them quick, again, before they had a chance to do any damage.

He raced forward quite a distance and looked them over. They were moving now; walking and talking to one another. Ackerman could not hear them for he was in his "time-ship" with the "lid" down for instant flight. He cursed the haze; it made a careful estimate of the instant of their arrival almost impossible. Especially now when they were beginning to blend in with the people of the "real world."

He saw it, then. They were idly walking, coming on the "time-strata" of solidity a full yard above the ground. Descending; walking through a "Real World" building toward a "Real World" sidewalk. They would meet—their "Real World" identities who were coming along the street in the same formation, talking in the same fashion.

Converging, wraith and ghost came together, passed through one another, approached a perfect register. Then as they blended into one being each, Ackerman gave a sharp cry and slammed down on his switch.

THE SAW IT again. They parted, wraiths from ghosts, and continued on their respective paths. The group in the "Real World" continued along the street, talking animatedly. The others—solid to Ackerman and themselves, stopped in baffled amazement.

They saw his car, and him. "What is this?" demanded Barry Ford. "Where did you come from? And how in the name of the Seven Deadly Sins do we seem to be walking—wading, so help me—ankle deep in the ground?"

Ackerman sat down in utter weariness. He had done it, all right. He had brought them! He had split the instant on the instant, and with this result.

In the world of "Reality", Barry and Louis Ford, and Joan and Tod Laplane were free to go and tell all. In his world of "time-space", Les Ackerman had four completely baffled people who would never have known of "time-space" and the split worlds if he, Ackerman, had not interfered.

He had wondered about the destruction of Calvin Blaine's world, had sent Blaine off to find his—Ackerman's—own previous "time-self" because it had been Ackerman's opinion that the destruction of Calvin Blaine's world only obtained in a situation where the Laplane-Ford group had been returned. That, he believed, was a transitory situation that would be averted as soon as he caught up with them.

Then came the next blaze of mental lightning. Calvin Blaine was no man's fool; knowing that Ackerman must release the other group after meeting Calvin for the first time, Blaine would also know that when he interrupted the love scene, it would be Ackerman's first knowledge of Calvin Blaine.

Then. Right then. If Calvin and Laurie Blaine permitted themselves to be caught up with the so-called "edge of time-space" with Lester Ackerman, the latter would never meet the Laplane-Ford group.

There would be no telling no information, and hence no strife. That of itself would be fine. But the twin worlds would eventually come together, both in "space" and in "time", and trouble would ensue from that alone. He, Ackerman, was the only man who could do something about that.

Quickly, he brought the group before him up to date. He told them as much as he could, told them to go and meet the Blaines, who were trying to get lost through the edge of the "time-split". It took some telling, some explanation, and quite a bit of convincing.

Eventually, they agreed. "But how will we go?" asked Barry Ford.

Ackerman wondered, and then grinned. "Simple; I'll not wait long. For I shall send the next person I meet in "time" to this instant to meet me. In fact," he said with genuine amusement, "I may send myself. And here I come now—see?"

The other car was sliding down, solidifying rapidly as it came into the "time-space" instant of Ackerman's Unreal "present".

"We—"

"Get going," said Les; "I want to talk to myself in peace and quiet." They left, and Ackerman went to the other car, which had landed.

THE DRIVER was a stranger. He was about Ackerman's size and build; perhaps a little less gaunt and strained. He had a certain grim humor; sardonic, but still compassionate.

He stepped from the car and faced Ackerman. "So," he said with a sarcastic leer, "You are Lester Ackerman. The Great Physicist!"

"Now listen," snarled Ackerman angrily. "I don't—"

"Well, well!" laughed the other. "Look, Ackerman; for a Great Physicist, you are certainly making a sheer mess out of this."

"It's pretty much of a mess as it is!"

"Only what you've made it. You know, I should really let you stew in your own juice; it'll make a better man of you. It's only that I want to see you come through this at all that I interfere. Chum, you've boiled up a real tangle."

"I have?"

"This mess is of your making." insisted the stranger. "Shall I recount?"

"Please do," snapped Ackerman superciliously. "But after you tell me who you are."

"I happen to be Tansie Lee's husband."

"You—" stammered Ackerman. That, possibly, was the one thing that could—and did—fluster him completely. Not only that, but he showed it in every line of his body, every gesture, every stammering syllable. The other got a laugh out of Ackerman's complete loss of personal control.

"Don't apologize," he said. "I sent Tansie Lee; I hoped that you would be smart enough to figure it out with her help. You aren't."

"Did you instruct Tansie Lee to make love to me?"

"Tansie did nothing wrong," said the man. "What was wrong—completely, and totally—was your attitude."

Then he held up a hand as Ackerman was about to continue. "Not now," he said. "You've got to untangle this mess first."

"Go ahead," said Les. "Untangle."

"You," said Tansie Lee's husband, "were met by my wife in a state of ignorance concerning this fine mixup. You were intercepted by the Blaines, whom you, yourself, sent recently to do the intercepting. You even gave them the information that would best cause the breakup of intelligent understanding between Tansie and yourself. The Blaines reached you and intercepted. That fouled up my initial plans. Then you and the Blaines were intercepted again by the Laplane-Ford

outfit—which you again sent to do the intercepting. Interestingly snarled, Ackerman; but when Barry Ford told you with such certainty that the Blaines were leading you to the instant of entrapped no-return at the so-called "edge of time-space", Barry Ford was merely echoing your own fears. Fears which were installed in you, by the way, by Barry, who was recounting your own—oh Hell and Damnation!"

"Mind telling me where the Blaines come in?"

"Certainly. But I won't. You brought them."

"I'll be damned if I bring them."

The other man smiled knowingly. "As you tried to corral the other gang?"

"Meaning?" demanded Les.

"There's many's the slip. '*A would some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as ithers see us.*'" quoted Tansie Lee's husband. "I suppose you're not to blame; but you will agree that it is quite a mess."

"Agreed. Now what do I do about it?"

"Ackerman, what started all this?"

"A strange explosion brought about by the temperon metal in the cyclotron-set-up."

"And how is it to end?"

ACKERMAN sat down and put his face in his hands. "I don't know," he said soberly. "It seems that I am to make a choice between worlds. I can save one but not the other."

As Ackerman sat there, face lowered and spirits lower, he was in complete misery and totally oblivious to everything about him. One thing only penetrated the depth of his introversion.

That one thing was the cool touch of a soft hand on his shoulder. There was a delicate scent—one that brought memories, both delicately fond and angrily disconcerting. Tansie Lee seated herself beside him and put an arm over his shoulder. "Don't do that to him," she said, speaking to her husband with pleading.

"I can't live his life," he answered; "one more thing, and he'll be all right."

Ackerman looked from one to the other, puzzled. Had he been the other man, he would have been consumed with jealousy. "What?" he asked weakly.

"I can't tell you completely," said the other, "but it has to do with the 'time-fission' and the temperon; you'll figure it out."

There came to Ackerman that he did have the answer. The way to solve the problem was to use his ability to remove the temperon from the cyclotron, and thus avert the explosion!

Tansie stood up. "Come on, Les," she said to him.

"Come on?" he asked dully.

"Yes," said her husband. "Finish what you started; you see, both Tansie and I have a rather large stake in this thing."

He turned and headed across the ground to a second time ship, entered, and left.

Ackerman stood up and shook his head nervously. "Well, Mrs. Lee," he said, and he mentally winced as he used her pet prefacing word.

She smiled, gaminlike, and said: "But I'm not Mrs. Lee. Tansie Lee is my given name. You see, Les, I am Mrs. Lester Ackerman!"

"Ye—but—uh—"

She laughed gurglingly. "That's another thing that is completely wrong with this 'time-space,'" she said; "right now I'm married to you but you aren't married to me. So if there's any question of convention, Lester, you are the guilty party, not I."

Ackerman sat back down again and groaned.

"But you be a good, sensible boy," she promised coyly, "And someday you will be."

"So that was—me?" he asked in a strained voice.

She nodded.

"You mean to tell me that I didn't recognize myself?" he demanded.

Again she nodded. "You see, Les, you—and everybody—is used to see-

ing himself in a mirror. No face or person is symmetrical; that mole on your right cheek is always on your mirror image's left cheek—but it was still on the other Ackerman's right cheek. Also, you expected that if that ship did contain yourself, coming to get you as you so happily told the Ford-Laplane outfit, you expected that you would make some wisecrack about it. Therefore you didn't expect yourself to be coming as - u - di'. Quite simple, ' call it."

"Another angle on this mad tangle," said Les. "I'll be glad to get out of it."

"So will I," said Tansie.

"And I'm going to start right now!"

9

BELOW THEM lay the depressed green-glaze bowl of atomic horror; above stood the silent laboratory, deserted and awaiting the arrival of the technicians for the next morning's work.

Hazily in sight was the temperon sample, and the radiation counters were clicking off at a fast rate.

"What are you going to do?" asked Tansie, in a voice that was filled with fear.

Ackerman stood up and stretched. "I am going to remove that sample," he said with an air of finality. "Then the time-fission will not take place, and there need be no ultimate conflict between the twin worlds."

"You mustn't," she breathed.

"No?"

"No," she told him. "For if you do, sha' not live. And we will never—" she let the sentence die.

He faced her squarely. "Tansie," he said, "It will be very easy for me to fall deeply in love with you. Given another day, and it would certainly obtain. Yet the lives and desires of two people must not prevail to the death and destruction of a world full of people. Though it mean death to me, I could not live knowing that billions of people died because I was selfish."

Tansie looked at him tearfully. "You'd sacrifice me?"

"You make it difficult," he said. "One life for a billion lives. And yet," he said, brightly, "you do exist; does that not prove something?"

"Only that in this world of probability and unreal existence, I am a definite probability."

"Yes," he told her. "This is the world of probability. I am not in the Real World, nor are you. If I do this, who is to tell me that we two may not go on forever in our own world of probability?"

"No," she said pleadingly. "Oh Les—I do so want—"

"I'll chance it," he said. "Because I must. I—look!"

Tansie turned. There, appearing with that thickening of the substance that characterized the arrival of a "time car" was the Blaines' ship. And beside it was the other one. Doors emerged, and the six got out of their ships and faced one another.

"So!" snapped Calvin Blaine. "We can finish this right here."

"Don't ask for mercy," snapped Barry Ford. "Nor expect sportsmanship. This is for keeps, and for the permanent existence of a whole world."

Tansie shuddered. "They'll fight," she said. "Because whichever side wins, they will prevent the others from returning to their worlds with the information that is needed. One and one alone will survive—and it is not fair, four to two, and Calvin Blaine an elderly man."

Tod Laplane lifted his gun; Laurie Blaine, her blonde hair a shining halo, pointed a revolver at Joan Laplane, who raced forward like a raven-haired fury, a gleaming knife in her hand. Barry Ford shook his broad shoulders and leaped—just as a shot rang out from the side.

They all turned. And across the space behind the Ford-Laplane ship there came another couple. A second Calvin and Laurie Blaine, armed.

In all, only four shots were fired before the embattled ones came to contact blows. Then the guns were

wrested from fighting hands and it was tooth and nail.

"Come on," said Ackerman. "Because what you see is but eight people. If we do not, there will be that many billions of people fighting to the death."

Their motion caught eyes in the fighting crowd. Both sides were apparently wary of more re-inforcements. None of them knew how many would be coming back; it is conceivable that whole armies could be built up of people returning to fight this battle.

But it was Les and Tansie Lee that they saw, and they stopped. Then Les and Tansie were in their ship, and Les was at the control board.

THE OTHER crowd boiled in, behind them, the fight forgotten, momentarily. They wanted Les Ackerman above all, for he was in a position to nullify any of their acts, regardless of which side won. He was not going to elude them again; they would continue this battle in Ackerman's presence so that the winner would be able to overpower the physicist.

Ackerman nudged the automatic controls. The "time-space" vehicle started forward in space and backwards in "time".

Behind him the two factions eyed one another suspiciously, and moved warily to get into fighting-position.

Les turned briefly, and shook his head. Getting into that battle himself would be no good. *Let them fight!* he said to himself. *Give me "time".* Ackerman could best win by removing the cause.

He flipped the top-hatch open and groped out of the moving ship with his gloved hand—the temperon-coated glove—hoping to locate by sheer luck the cyclotron target and the temperon sample. By luck aided with a good memory of where it was. He thought for a moment that he, himself, was not far from here in both "time" and "space". He was separated in space by the radiation-proof barrier, and in "time" only by the few instants of temporal fission.

Then he saw it! Vaguely, dimly, distorted by the gray-green haze that enveloped the ship in motion.

The ship stalled. It could not penetrate the barrier of "time" to head into the "past" which would have been previous to the fission of "time". So Ackerman nudged the power up higher and the temporal drive of the ship strained against the barrier like an automobile straining against an immobile wall.

Ackerman reached for the temperon.

Tansie cried: "No; Les!" She ran to take his hands from the open hatch.

He took her by the shoulders and shook her gently. "You'll be all right," he said softly; "it is a chance we must take!"

"But—" she said uncertainly, and stopped because of the roar that came from behind.

"Ackerman!" bellowed Tod Laplane. "He's removing the original temperon!"

"If he does!" swore Barry Ford, "We'll not exist!"

Their private fight forgotten, both factions turned and hurled themselves at Ackerman.

Eight people to one—and Tansie Lee still against his purpose to boot; he shook her free and reached, missed and tried again.

The roar of noise stopped. Ackerman caught it out of the corner of one eye. Tansie Lee still believed that the removal of the temperon and the resulting correction of the "time-split" would make her non-existent, but she was standing there with a wicked-looking shotgun poised across one shapely hip. If she fired, the kick would turn her around, and Tansie knew it, for she was pointing the gun to her left. The second shot would sweep the right side of the room, and the chances were excellent that no one would be much alive after the third.

Limbo—the land of non-existence—might be her lot, but until she left here, no one was going to harm Les Ackerman.

He shook all thoughts from his

mind and reached again. And this time he touched it!

THE GRAY-GREEN haze parted in a flare of light. Ackerman saw both the deuterium-ice target and the temperon clearly; it was the latter that gave him pause.

For out from the temperon sample was growing a shimmering, uncertain sphere of energy. It expanded and then hurled itself outward with lightning rapidity. Out it went, to the ends of the infinite universe.

Then destruction, sheer and complete, broke loose. "The "time-ship" was hurled away, but not before they saw solid matter burst into a coruscation of incandescent gas, and flame up out of its wraithlike self into a pillar of boiling clouds that headed for the stratosphere. Below them, the ground seared upwards and sintered downwards and fused into an ugly gray-green glaze.

"So," said Ackerman, shaking with reaction. "So Lester Ackerman himself is the cause of the fission in "time". You may stop fighting, gentlemen. Tansie, you can stop pointing that cannon at them, too."

Calvin Blaine came forward and took it from her shaking hands. She turned blindly, like an automaton; then she looked up at Les and reality came once more across her face. "Les!" she cried and hurled herself forward into his arms.

Calvin turned to his other, "time-separated" self. "Please leave," he said. "This is most disconcerting."

One Laurie Blaine shrugged at the other. "I don't even like myself as competition," she said.

One pair of Blaines left the ship; the other Calvin Blaine looked out of the window and chuckled. "They left," he said, "just in time to get into that fight!"

"Then this," replied his daughter, "is the ship they came in."

"Ours is over there," said Blaine; "let's go."

"But what about them—and him?" asked Laurie indicating the others in Ackerman's ship.

"I think," said Blaine, "that nothing we do can change much right

now; Ackerman himself is the one that must be moving next."

Barry Ford grunted angrily. It was quite apparent that a sudden thought had occurred to him. He herded his friends out and into their own ship.

"Hell!" said Blaine, taking Laurie by the arm and almost hurling her out.

"What's got into them?" asked Tansie.

"It has occurred to them that there is one more very definite danger for them all. They've got to go there to prevent it. Foolishly, they're hurrying when they know that I've got a lot of work to do first, and still will end up where they are at the proper instant."

"Work?" asked Tansie.

"Uh-huh," he said. "I've some correcting to do. Will you drive us along the Blaines' side of this 'Time-stream'. I'm going to peck at the typewriter a bit."

* * *

IT WAS a long time later. Ackerman had written several thousand words on the subject, and was now peering through one of the ship windows at the laboratory through which the "time-space" ship was parked. Then, satisfied, he nodded. "Push here," he said cryptically.

"Huh?" asked Tansie.

"Part of my corrective work," he said. "So help me, I started this mess; I'm going to be the one that cleans it up."

He used the projector to drag a few odd items into the "time-space" from the "real world" laboratory.

"On the other side of that barrier," he told Tansie, "there are a couple of

characters bootlegging a bit of private research."

"What are you going to do?"

"They are going to have themselves a high-grade atomic explosion."

"Won't that be dangerous? And how will it cause corrective measures?"

Les grinned with self-satisfaction. "This," he said waving his hands, "is the world of throttled research. Like all times of prohibition, there are people who will bootleg, whether it be liquor, dope, or knowledge. This explosion, however, will do two things to that world. They will understand that there are a lot of people doing the same thing—and will also know that this same thing might happen again and again, because no one has the faintest idea of what anybody else is doing! When the first chemist mixed gunpowder, he was able to warn other chemists not to mix more than so much—or else. But after this atomic blowup, no one will be able to do any warning—and they'll not know what line of research these people were taking."

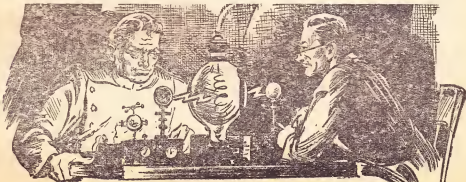
"Yes," said Tansie uncertainly.

"Then, in order to bring it all out in the clear and the open, they must repeal their laws that throttle and forbid research. This will make Blaine's world less divergent."

He reached forward with his temperon-clad glove and took firm hold of the temperon sample in the "Real" world cyclotron.

During the boiling, coruscating roar of the atomic hell, Tansie held her breath. The ship was driven away before she spoke.

"Temperon again," she said. "Isn't



that likely to cause another "time-split"?"

He shook his head. "No," he said. "'Time' splits only when there is two very definite possibilities for a future. Individual and minute acts such as might be called a major catastrophe on earth do nothing to disturb the 'temporal' advance. You see, Tansie, Man is an animal possessing free will, and he can do as he pleases. But his every act is based upon his past experience, and therefore whatever he does is reasonably predictable. Therefore, while it is possible to state that a tree might grow in two possible ways, the fact is that it grows only one way and therefore we have no multiplicity of worlds of probability. There is no Wheel of If."

10

BUT WHAT about the people who were running that thing?" asked Tansie.

"Tough," said Ackerman, "But better them than—"

"No," said Tansie, taking his arm and shaking it pleadingly. "Not murder, Les."

"Okay," he said. "But you are making me a lot of trouble. By insisting, I mean."

"How?"

"Watch," he said. He drove the "time-space" ship back towards the "past", and stopped it previous to the explosion. He plied the projector in the operating chamber of the cyclotron, and two people solidified and came to the unreal world. "Meet Calvin and Laurie Blaine," said Ackerman.

Tansie gulped and sat down hard. Calvin Blaine blinked and said: "How did this come to be?"

Ackerman shook his head tiredly. He handed Blaine the several sheets of typescript. "Here," he said. "This gives you enough information for a beginning. Once you grasp the situation, you are to do the job outlined on the last four pages."

He turned to Tansie. "Drive the ship to Barry Ford's world, while I try to explain what's to be done."

"What are you going to do?" she asked him.

"There's some strings still untied," smiled Ackerman, who was now master of the situation and worthy of the name of Great Physicist. "The Blaines are going to build me my laboratory!"

He left Calvin and Laurie in the familiar woods of Wisconsin on the other world, complete with his projector and the plans. Then down through the "time-space" he and Tansie went, on that world, to an era which Ackerman knew to be the critical "time".

"We 'pushed' there," he said. "Now we pry here."

"What kind of measure comes here?"

"Same prescription," said Ackerman, reaching for his temperon-clad glove.

"And is this where the Ford-Laplace outfit comes in?"

"No. Since this is the world of free research, the cyclotron laboratory will be remotely controlled and unattended; no one will get hurt."

"But I don't understand how the same cure works on both worlds," complained Tansie.

"Very simple. The other world didn't know what one another was doing because everybody was afraid to talk. In this world no one knows what his neighbor is doing because, with everybody doing it, there is too little correlation of effort. No one has to ask anybody's permission to tinker, and so when this laboratory goes up, again no one will be quite sure of what caused it."

"But those who were running it will," objected Tansie.

Ackerman smiled. "Tansie Lee is one of my favorite cooks," he told her. "She's been cooking for years. And would Tansie know what happened if she mixed up a batch of baking powder biscuits out of her grandmother's old tried and true recipe—used in the family for years—and when she popped them in the oven to cook, they exploded and destroyed the end of the house?"

"So?" she smiled. "You're going to take a standard experiment and fudge it up?"

"Yup," he said with a grin, waving a bit of temperon, held in his temperon-clad glove.

Again the explosion boiled skyward, and the flame and the blast seared the eyeballs and battered at the eardrums. Then it was over, and they were gone again.

"And now?" asked Tansie.

"Now we effect the coalescence of two worlds of probability," he told her.

* * *

LES ACKERMAN drove the "time-space" vehicle at a headlong pace into the "future". He nodded with satisfaction when he noted that the destruction of Calvin Blaine's world was not to be. And though he had never seen the opposing success in probability—the destruction of the world of free research—he knew about when its probable destruction took place. He watched, and was gratified to know that his acts had averted the successful culmination of either side's plans for conquest.

On through "time-space" went Ackerman and Tansie Lee, across the years until it was apparent that the twin worlds of dual probability were, indeed, coming closer together. For as Les explained it, when the world of throttled research opened up, and the world of too-free research closed down, they began to become more and more like one another. So they were coming closer together not only in attitude, but in "space" as well.

Slowly and ponderously they came together. It took years from the initial tangential contact to where their surfaces were almost in perfect register.

And Ackerman sought through the doubled-world again and found running the "time-space" vehicle difficult because the congruency of the two worlds made through-passage impossible. But across the world he went, even so.

And he found what he was looking for. In both worlds, men were working on research problems. It was a crazy scene; the laboratories were in excellent register, and appeared as one. The men, of course, were free



to move, and they were not performing the same acts. It made for a blurring, maddening scene to watch men working furiously in a large laboratory and working *through* one another.

Then one man in each world turned from his work and held up a sample. They were about eight feet apart in space.

Their fellows stopped work also, and each group went below.

"Now," said Ackerman, "if we're lucky—"

"This," said Tansie Lee, "is where we part."

"Part?" he asked in wonder.

She nodded. "I am going—back—to you—my husband. After all, Lester,

we have yet to meet for the truly first time. That is—well—I mean I can't very well marry you twice in "time", you know. You'll have to make the acquaintance of Tansie Lee for the first time, too."

"When do we part?"

"As soon as you are successful."

"I'll be looking for you," he said. Then he stopped short, standing in the hallway of the laboratory as the men tramped past—through—the two of them on their way to the cyclotron chamber below.

He took her by the shoulders and turned her to face him. "I can kiss a married woman," he said, "with a free mind so long as she is married to me."

She went into his arms to be held—as she was holding him—close. Ackerman more than half expected another interruption, but it did not come. That annoying thought faded as he found his entire attention held by the softly eager woman in his arms. Long, tender, silent moments passed, and then returned reality.

"I like your looks," he told her. "And that was a temporary good-bye. I'll be most careful not to make any mistakes."

Tansie's eyes were shining brightly but she merely nodded and said only: "Auf wiedersehen, my darling."

ACKERMAN turned and hurried down the laboratory steps with Tansie behind him. They arrived just as both technicians were placing the samples to be bombarded in the cyclotron—one in each world but in perfect register. Ackerman stood in the room beside the big machine as the others left, his temperon-clad glove poised over the congruent samples.

Then and only then he saw the rest. They came hurriedly, fearfully. But not in hatred of one another.

Calvin Blaine shook his head. "You should not have done this," he said.

"But it is done," added Barry Ford. "Now he must have perfect coordination, or else."

Tod Laplane shrugged. "If he coalesces these twin worlds at the wrong 'time', there will be the damndest celestially cosmic explo-

sion since the beginning of the universe."

Louis Ford said: "Maybe that's how the universe really started."

Laurie Blaine shook her head. "Don't be a pessimist," she said. Then she turned to Ackerman with pleading eyes. "Please be careful," she said. "After all, you haven't met Tansie Lee yet; and I am your woman, Lester."

Joan Laplane, as attractively dark as Laurie Blaine was beautifully blonde, stood beside the other girl. There was no sign of scorn, nor even embarrassment between them, and she added her bit to the moment: "You'd not destroy a world for the love of a woman, Lester. That's commendable. I've not mentioned how I felt because of reasons known to both of us. But," she said to Ackerman, but facing both Tansie Lee and Laurie Blaine, "until Lester places a wedding ring on some girl's finger, I'm considering myself as active competition."

Tansie laughed confidently. "Dream on," she said, "but remember, I'm the one he'll marry."

"That's only a good probability," said Laurie. "But no certain thing."

"Shut up," said Calvin Blaine. "This is no time to get his nerves on edge. Ackerman, don't do it. Let these worlds diverge again, and go on whole."

Ackerman shook his head. "Can't be done," he said.

Then the cyclotron started beside him, and a stream of bluish haze surrounded the target and the sample. Ackerman timed it, and then clamped his hand down hard on the bit of temperon in the machine...

THERE WAS a solid wave of sound, and a torrent of sheer energy that stormed at them. The earth shook in a series of abrupt shocks, and from somewhere there converged a film of shimmering something that marked the boundary of a field of energetic force. It came closing in, and disappeared within the bit of temperon. That much Ackerman saw before he blacked-out completely, shaken with pain.

But this was no atomic explosion.

Instead of sending the laboratory skyward in a billowing cloud of energetic particles, the force of the blast was confined to the space within the cyclotron room.

And then the energy that was compressed by the spherical shell was driven into the "past"—into the era of "fissioned-time". That period needed that cosmic energy in order to function at all.

The cycle was ended, the story finished. Ackerman had started the fission, and had effected its end.

The cyclotron workers, all unknown, had coalesced; had become a single probability again. They entered, and found Ackerman lying there.

It never was explained to their satisfaction. Nor could they understand why and how he managed to be in the cyclotron chamber during a bombardment without getting badly irradiated. Ackerman accepted their help and their solace for his aches, but said no more.

He started to leave the laboratory, and he was very thoughtful. He alone of them all was here. The Fords, Laplanes, and Blaines were all gone inexplicably—possibly back into the realm of unreal "time". That meant that the Blaines went back to their laboratory to be—

Not necessarily. Forewarned is forearmed and Ackerman had no proof that they were in the explosion. They could not stop the blow-up, but they could, and probably would, leave for safety so soon as the time-conservation-energy factor returned them.

But even so, Ackerman was sorry. Sorry, and yet glad. For his possible woman-trouble had gone along with the trouble with the time-split.

He looked out of the door and saw—

Tansie Lee!

"Tansie!" he shouted.

THE RAN—and crashed through the glass of the door, landed on the sidewalk in a welter of broken glass. She turned. "Impulsive, aren't you?"

"Tansie!" he breathed, reaching for

her hands.

"That is my name," she said, "But who are you?"

"Les Ackerman," he told her. "And you'll be seeing a lot of me!"

She smiled. "Come and tell me about it," she said. She looked up at him leadingly—and for the first time, Lester Ackerman noticed that her eyes were as blue as any blonde's—Laurie's, for instance, but her complexion was definitely brunette, as dark as Joan's. Her auburn hair was—about halfway between.

He linked arms with her. "This," he said, "is probably the best of all probable worlds."

* * *

Epilogue—

The woman moved from her husband's arms and faced the vehicle with distaste. "I hate to go," she said.

"You must," he told her. "And quickly, or there will not be enough power to penetrate the 'Real World' back to the 'fissioned-time'. I'd send someone else, but no one but you and I can go through 'time' to the dual worlds."

She nodded unhappily, and started the machine. It disappeared instantly, leaping the "time" between now and the "time" of fissioned probability, where such a machine could easily function. It was back immediately, and she hurled herself tearfully into her husband's arms.

"I've muffed it terribly," she sobbed.

He stroked her head, and then seated her on the ground beside the machine. He got in, disappeared, and also returned instantly.

"There," he told her. "And that is that."

He lifted her from the ground, put his arm about her lissome waist, and walked her to the house, leaving the machine.

Tomorrow he would dismantle it. It was the only one of its kind, and its usefulness was over. Finished, washed-up, obsolete. After a total Real Operating Time of less than ten milliseconds.

But during which time it had really been around!

THE END

the
**SECRET
PEOPLE**

Feature Novelet

by

**James Blish
and
Damon Knight**

(illustration by Fawcette)

*Now he could see into the
great ship, and the beings
looked like titanic Humans.*



The Crew of the Conquest believe themselves to be the first men to leave the Earth — until another space-ship, an enormous space-ship, is sighted. Only the other ship can only be seen from certain angles . . .



SERGEANT Rosoff, the red-haired radarman of the *Conquest*, took little interest in his own dreams. Once in a long while he had a nightmare worth remembering a day or so; that was all. But on the twenty-fourth day out of Earth, he suddenly remembered a dream he had had when he was nine.

He had gone to sleep with his head full of a new determination, born of a visit to the Pittsburgh freight shuttles—he was going to be an engineer. That, and the whistles for the night shifts in the mills, triggered his dream. He was aboard a slow train through paradise. There was limpid air and sunshine, and green all around him, and everywhere a thousand wonderful things to see. But he couldn't look; he had to stoke, and he would be punished if he stopped. At last the temptation overcame him and he stole a glance—but They detected him, and the blow began to fall, and... He awoke, shivering on the narrow cot.

That was why he didn't lift his face from the light-trap of the iconoscope, when the muffled roar of the *Conquest's* engines abruptly died away. Behind him there was an eager shuffling and Captain Cronin brushed past him, clinging with brown, muscular hands to the handrail, his sneaker-clad feet touching the deck awkwardly every yard or so. Evidently Cronin thought he ought to go through the motions of walking, even though there was hardly any gravity. Sergeant Rosoff sat where he was and kept his eyes steadily on the quivering, green radar pip.

"Aren't you coming, Rosy?" Cronin said, taking a fresh handhold. "I should think you'd've had enough of that ike by now. We've hit our orbit, so you can let the beam go hang."

"Yes sir," Rosoff sighed, and got up. For twenty-three days these four men, the first to attempt the moon circuit which unmanned ships had been making for a year, had had no more than split-second glimpses out the ports. "Never mind the gawping," iron-gray Colonel Lazar had

ordered. "A moment's inattention on the way and we'll all be corpses; there'll be plenty of time to look when we take up our orbit."

But when the moment came, Sergeant Rosoff remembered his dream, and was afraid to look.

"Coming, Rosy?" Captain Cronin repeated. He didn't bother to wait for an answer. By the time the sergeant had clutched the handrail, his superior was out of sight around the center bulge, where the gyroscope shaft was. Just before he vanished, Rosoff saw a disc of bright, clear white light crawl across his back.

Rosoff knew it was moonlight, coming through the plastic camera port, but it was a second or so before he could forget the sunshine of paradise. With a lopsided grin, he hauled himself along the passage to the bulge and squatted. Let the others look through the big observation port in the bow. He'd steal his first glimpse.

THE FIRST thing he saw was a ship.

The walls of the tube refracted the brilliant glare from the surface of the moon confusingly, but there was no question about the ship. It was too big to doubt.

How big, he couldn't tell. There are no perspective lines in space. But something in the lines of it made him think that it was several times the size of the *Conquest*. Also, it looked—efficient.

Rosoff closed his eyes for a moment, but afterwards the thing was still there. Russian? he thought. Or—Martian or something like that?

"This," Sergeant Rosoff told himself wryly, "is what I get for peeking."

He straightened up and squeezed himself around the bulge. Ahead, a flood of moonlight was pouring down the passage, and when he entered the control room it was like being plunged into icy silver. The three officers seemed dazed by it; they talked in whispers.

"Beg pardon, sir—"

"What—oh. Don't be formal, Rosy," the Colonel said affably.

"We've made it, man! Look at it! That's better than the pictures, eh?"

"Yessir," said Rosoff. "Have you seen the other ship, sir?"

Captain Cronin turned his head sharply. "Other ship? Could they have sent a scout-rocket along after us or—no, you must have seen a sharp crater-shadow, Rosy. There's nothing down there."

"No, sir," Rosoff insisted. "I know a crater when I see one; this was a ship." He stepped up to the operating ledge and peered out at the dazzling, pocked globe ahead and below. "It's hidden by the bulge of our own ship here. But it's there. I couldn't tell for certain, but I think it's larger than we are."

All three were staring at him now. "You'd better be right, Sergeant," Major Leigh growled. "This is a hell of a time for a practical joke."

"No joke, sir."

Leigh grunted and reached for the controls. Colonel Lazar raised his hand sharply. "What do you plan, Leigh?"

"Couple of turns on the gyro—turn us where we can see this phantom."

"Better not; we're no kiddy-car. I don't want to risk setting up an oscillation we can't stop. Where did you see this from, Rosy?"

"Starboard camera port, sir."

The Colonel floated off the ledge and went down the passage. The others filed after him. Rosoff could hear them jockeying for their turns at the port, and muffled vocal noises. When they came back, their faces were ghastly in the glare.

"Sergeant Rosoff," said Lazar.

"Yessir?"

"You saw that thing first. Did it move into view, or was it just floating there like it is now?"

"Just floating, sir. It seems to be following about the same course we are."

"The question is," said Captain Cronin, looking handsomely grim, "who are they? They've got a hell of a lot more on the ball than the U. S. Army, that's a cinch. If they're unfriendly—"

Rosoff coughed. "Sir—we've never

lost an unmanned rocket, have we?"

"Not out this far—oh, I see what you're driving at. That must have been out here long before us—would have pinched our first robot shots if they were out for trouble."

"Yes, sir. But that's not quite all—"

"You bet it's not all," Colonel Lazar broke in. "If they come from our planet, they don't come from our country. And whatever other country sent them has been almighty careful to keep quiet about it. So, if they're showing themselves openly—"

"—they don't mean for us to get back with the news," Cronin finished from the operation ledge. "I think that's the answer. I can see them from here now. They're overhauling us." He scanned his shipmates unhappily. "I think I'm about to learn the answer to a lifelong question."

"What's that?" Lazar demanded irritably.

"Whether or not a baked bean dodges when the can-opener approaches."

THE GIANT vessel drew closer very slowly, but it was plain that Rosoff had underestimated its size. It was long and smooth, like an anti-aircraft bullet; it had no ports, no jets, no obvious armament, and no visible means of support—and it could have used the *Conquest* for a lifeboat.

"They've crossed our course," said Leigh unnecessarily. "They're rising, but they can't intercept us now without swerving back again."

"I don't doubt that that baby can make a U turn on a dime if he wants to," Lazar muttered. "There's something else on his mind; do you suppose he doesn't see us?"

"Can't very well, sir, unless he's got a radarcast going out," Rosoff said. "I think we're too small to notice against a black sky, and the Earth is 'way off line."

"Hm," said Lazar blowing gently into his moustache. "Then we've met by chance? I can't say I like that

any better—it means the moon must be swarming with these monsters. No, I'm afraid we're It."

There was a moment's long pause as the four of them waited, watching the pointed prow of the other ship slide into view in the thick plastic port. The *Conquest* was silent except for the whirr of the air conditioners, just above the threshold of audibility.

Major Leigh slapped the handrail with the heel of his hand. "Why don't they *do* something?" he said to no one in particular.

Lazar had been rubbing his gray chin, staring abstractedly through the port. Now his brows drew down; he darted a hawklike glance at Rosoff and snapped, "Sergeant, go and find out if they're signalling. You'll be relieved as soon as the rest of us get into our pressure suits. Cronin, get your suit on and then stand by the engines. I'll take the board."

Rosoff darted back down the passage, propelling himself by a tug at the handrail, a push against the inner hull. He paused again at the camera port, but the other ship was out of sight.

He pulled himself into his chair, snapped the seatlock down, and turned on the radio transceiver, unused since they had passed the Heavieside Layer. When it warmed up, he turned the dial carefully from the highest frequency he could receive to the lowest and back again. It was silly, of course; nothing came through but sun-static. He assumed that he had been given a detail to keep him busy, and philosophically kept at it.

AFTER ABOUT twenty minutes Leigh came back, his bald head shining dimly under the laminated glass fishbowl. The polarizing film stopped almost seventy per cent of direct light, but there was enough glare from the gray steel bulkheads to show his features clearly. He waved a tightly-sheathed arm at Rosoff. "Okay," said the diaphragm

below his helmet. "Go get your suit, Rosy. Pick up anything?"

"No, sir," said Rosoff. "What's happening up forward?"

"Nothing," said Leigh irritably. He picked up the radio headset, let go of it again, and switched the output to the loudspeaker. The room filled with a crackling roar.

Rosoff propelled himself aft to the sleeping quarters, got his suit out of the locker and struggled into it. All the fastenings were in front, but it still took him ten minutes of earnest effort to get the thing adjusted properly.

When he got back to the control room, Colonel Lazar and Captain Cronin were seated tensely on the ledge, staring at the white torpedo shape which now filled less than an eighth of the observation port. Being without orders, Rosoff made himself as unobtrusive as possible and watched.

After a moment Cronin said, "Whatever power they were using is off again. They've struck an orbit."

"Yes," said Lazar. He shoved a thick finger at the intercom stud and said, "Leigh, you can cut off that damned racket now. Come up here."

The blare of static ceased, and a moment later Leigh joined them in the control room. He looked at Rosoff, floating with his line clipped to the aft handrail, but said nothing. After a moment he moved over beside the sergeant.

Cronin, who was not normally an imaginative man, said slowly, "Colonel, I have the damndest feeling that they don't even know we're here—that we're beneath their notice, or something."

Lazar snorted. Without turning his globed head he remarked, "I suppose they're a sort of blood corpuscle in the ether, eh? Now, if a phagocyte happened to come along..."

Cronin's body jerked convulsively against the seatlock. "Look!"

It was over so quickly that Rosoff was not quite sure what he had seen. In the port, something huge

and shining appeared for a split instant, flashed past the other ship and was gone. He saw the ship lurch and begin to drift slowly toward the bottom of the port. A dark streak appeared on its upper limb, revolved slowly and disappeared. A few moments later it reappeared and vanished in the same way.

Rosoff's involuntary start had carried him away from the handrail. He grabbed for the short line automatically and reeled himself in. "What's that? What's that?" Lazar was saying. "...hit them," Leigh's voice cut in. They're out of control, they're fall—..." "A meteorite, by God!" Cronin shouted. All of them stared through the port, gauging the alien ship's fall.

2

SLOWLY, very slowly, it descended and grew larger in the port. Then it stopped. The gash left by the meteorite, or whatever had struck it, appeared once more, vanished and did not return. The ship had stopped rotating.

"They're under control again," said Leigh with evident disappointment in his voice.

"Partly, anyhow," corrected Lazar. "Take another sight on it, Leigh. I want to know whether or not they're using power, and their course and velocity with respect to us."

Leigh trained the twin barrels of the range-finder on the ship ahead and took readings at one-second intervals. He punched the keys of the tiny mechanical calculator and announced, "They're not using power. I didn't measure the angular progression, but it isn't much. If they're in a crash trajectory, it'll take them a long time to hit."

"What about their speed?" Lazar demanded.

"Well, we're overhauling them at the rate of two point nine feet per second. Let's see, our present velocity—"

"All right," said Lazar; "I don't want the absolute velocity. That's

enough. In other words, if they maintain their present course and velocity we'll overtake them in—that's about a thousand feet an hour—about five and a quarter hours."

Leigh agreed, "That's close enough. I can give you the exact time if you want—"

"It's too damned close!" said Cronin. "If you'll excuse me, sir, I think we should change our course as soon as Leigh can figure a new orbit. If we keep on as we are, all we can hope for is that they won't take the trouble to board us. That's carrying optimism a little too far."

Lazar looked at him. "I wish it were that easy, Captain," he said. "Our fuel safety factor is six per cent. We can change course; but if we do, it's anybody's guess whether we'll land safely or not. In any case—Leigh, that six per cent gives us about two or three degrees of arc to work with at this speed, doesn't it?"

Leigh nodded.

"All right," said Lazar. "Call it three and say that we start the jets twenty minutes from now. How far away would we be from that thing's predicted position at the end of five hours?"

Leigh took another reading, punched the calculator again, scribbled on a pad for a minute, and finally looked up and said, "About five hundred miles, give or take fifty."

"All right," said Lazar again. He opened his seatlock, snapped his line to a ring on the control ledge, and turned to face the other three, floating in a sitting position a few inches above the chair-arm. "Now look here. I grant you, Cronin, we're in a dangerous position if we keep to this course. But suppose we make the maximum correction our fuel reserve allows, and suppose those guys out there have got their ship repaired by the end of five hours. That's a dangerous position too. We'll not only have let ourselves in for a nasty landing, but we'll have no fuel reserve to maneuver with if they do come after us. The question is, which would you like—the frying pan or the fire?"

"And which is which?" said Ros-

off, forgetting himself. He added "sir" just in time.

LAZAR LOOKED at him in some surprise, obviously having forgotten momentarily that the sergeant was present. Then he nodded. "Right," he said. "God knows, that six per cent factor isn't likely to do us much good either way. But maybe it's vital; anyhow it's all we've got. But how the devil are we going to tell, one—" He stuck out a gloved finger clumsily. "How seriously is that ship damaged? Two—is it armed? Three—what are its intentions toward us, if any? Four—how much fuel reserve has it got, and what speed can it make? And so on." He slapped the hand down onto his thigh, then put his other hand on the chair to steady himself.

"Any comments?" he asked. "Make it quick."

"I still say let's not take any chances," said Cronin immediately. "Let's get as far away as we can, and take our chances with the landing."

Lazar looked at Leigh, who frowned. "I don't know, Colonel," he said; "I sure wish we had more data."

"Hm," said Lazar, and his eye fell on Sergeant Rosoff. "What about you, Rosy?" he said.

Rosoff sweated slightly. He had an opinion, but offering it would be sticking his neck out. If it were followed and turned out to be the wrong thing—and if they managed to get back to Earth with whole skins anyhow—That was too many ifs, he decided.

"Well, sir," he said, "I'd suggest a compromise. If we change course now, we'll get only five hundred miles, which won't be enough anyhow if that thing is as fast as it looks. Suppose we were to keep this course for two hours more. If we decide then to change course, we'll still get half that distance. Meanwhile we'll have had two hours to observe them, and we may learn enough to make a better decision."

Leigh gawped at him, and Cronin looked a little sore, but Lazar nodded slowly. "I'll buy that," he said. "Any other comments?"

There were none.

DURING THE first hour, the alien ship grew to twice its former apparent size, but they saw nothing of interest. The rounded, narrow tail which it presented to them was perfectly featureless, glowing uniformly like the rest in the moonlight. They could detect no change in the ship's motion, and Leigh's observations, taken every ten minutes, confirmed that there was none. In this time Leigh also calculated its orbit, and found that at their nearest approach the *Conquest* would be not more than half a mile above and to port of the other ship.

During the second hour, part of the gash made by the meteorite came into view again, and they could make out occasional flickers of movement inside it. It must have been this, Rosoff thought later, which determined the odd decision Lazar made then. Like the sergeant himself—like, in some degree, Cronin and Leigh as well—Lazar wanted to know. It would have been maddening for a man of any imagination to pass that silent, strange shape without learning what it was and what it meant. By this time, without any further discussion, they had abandoned the possibility that the ship came from their own planet.

"I'm going to risk it," Lazar summed it up. "As you say, Cronin, the consequences if we fail to get back and report this ship may be very serious. For all we know, it's the first scout of an invasion fleet, and so on—it's easy enough to fill in *that* picture. But we don't know; that's the whole trouble. There are two other possibilities we can't ignore. One, that the crew of that ship is a potential enemy, but that they're so badly hurt that they're no danger to us. Two, that this is a purely accidental meeting, one which might not occur again in a million years. I personally would never forgive myself if I'd failed to do everything in my power to investigate that possibility."

He finished, "We'll stay on this course, gentlemen, until we reach conjunction or until something happens to alter the circumstances. If

they make no move to board us, then by God, we'll assume they're a derelict and board them."

Two hours later, he called for a volunteer.

* * *

Rosoff, although he had acquired some knowledge of astrophysics in his pre-Army days and had always been fascinated by the idea of space-flight, was not one of the original members of the crew; he had been chosen almost at the last minute and almost as an afterthought. He was the only noncommissioned officer aboard the *Conquest*, and his only official duty was to watch the radar ike. But for some reason it was obviously expected that he would volunteer first. The logic of this was not quite clear to Rosoff. He volunteered anyhow.

Floating in the ship's tiny airlock while the air was being pumped out of it, Sergeant Rosoff, twenty-seven years old, red-haired, unmarried, with a face that looked by turns brutish and scholarly, remembered his dream again.

For the third time he checked the belt that held, among other equipment, the ten reaction cylinders with their double-grip frame. The throb of the air-pump stopped, and a signal light winked on in the bulkhead. Rosoff turned the dogs and swung the door open onto empty space.

Remembering his dream, he was at first not at all startled to discover that the alien ship had vanished.

Below, the molten-silver disc of the moon was where it should be; the stars were in their former positions. Ahead, and to his right where the alien ship should have been hanging, was nothing at all.

Amazement took him then, and he thought, *Good Lord, can it move that fast?* He thrust his phonejack into the wall socket and said, "Can't see the ship from here, Colonel. Where is it?"

There was a pause and then Lazar's voice answered, "What do you mean you can't see it? It's square off the starboard bow."

Rosoff took another, unnecessary,

glance out the open airlock door. "It's not there, sir," he said.

The pause was longer. Finally Lazar said, "Come up here."

Rosoff dogged the door tight again and opened the valve in the inner door.

In the control room, he looked out the port and saw the ship; it was almost exactly where it had been before.

"All right, explain yourself, Sergeant," said Lazar grimly. "Have you turned yellow, or what?"

Rosoff felt bewildered. "I don't quite know, sir," he said humbly. "All I know is, that ship is not visible from the airlock."

Lazar heistated, then said, "Take the board, Leigh. I'm going to see for myself."

TWENTY minutes later, Lazar was back. He stared long and hard at the torpedo-shape visible in the plastic port. He said, "I will be damned."

Cronin asked incredulously, "Colonel, do you mean it really doesn't show from the airlock?"

"It doesn't," Lazar said. "Let me think."

After a moment he said, "Look here, do any of you know anything about the Unified Field Theory?"

Rosoff waited a second, then cleared his throat tentatively. "I know a little, sir," he said.

"Well, Sergeant," said Lazar, "is there anything in it to account for that?" He waved his gloved hand at the ship.

"No, sir," said Rosoff unhappily. He considered a moment, and a wild idea struck him. "Look, sir," he said, "there's just one thing that might account for it."

"What's that?" asked Cronin.

Rosoff put a finger to his helmet. "This is laminated glass," he said. "The ports are pressure-formed plastic—stronger, but they haven't made it in anything but plate form yet. It sounds crazy, but it looks as if plastic made by that process is the only thing you can see the ship

through. If the ports were made of glass, we'd never have known it was there."

They digested that in silence for a moment; then Leigh said, "Is it there?"

"Certainly," snapped Lazar. "That's sloppy thinking, Leigh." He turned to Rosoff. "You've come up with more useful information than anybody else so far. Can you suggest any reason why it should be that way?"

Rosoff hated to admit it, but, "No, sir," he said. "I don't know much about the plastic, except that it's forced into moulds at several thousand pounds pressure, and it's very heavy and strong."

"That's as much as I know," admitted Lazar. "But nobody's ever discovered any odd optical properties in it, or the Army never would have used the stuff."

"That's so, sir," Rosoff said. "That seems to indicate that the ship out there is made of something not found on Earth, or else something present in very minute quantities..."

Another idea occurred to him. "Colonel," he said slowly, "I read an article last month about a new subatomic particle called the neutrino. Let me think—I believe it has about the mass of an electron and the size of a proton—and no charge. There was originally some attempt to identify it as a component of the cosmic rays, but it broke down. Anyhow, what I'm getting at is, this particle was discovered by means of a plastic that fluoresces when a burst of neutrinos hits it—and I'm almost sure it's the same plastic we're using for ports."

He paused. So far it was okay, but the next part was wild.

"Go on," said Lazar, leaning forward intently.

"Well," said Rosoff, "suppose the neutrino is a new kind of atom rather than a new kind of particle. Suppose there are sections of the universe that are made of it—stars and planets and people on the planets who build spaceships."

"You're stretching probability a bit, aren't you?" Cronin put in.

"Not yet, sir, but I will in a minute," Rosoff told him respectfully. He cast a glance out the port, then looked at Lazar again. "Then suppose that this plastic doesn't fluoresce under the impact of a neutrino—it would be easy to be wrong about that, since it's just been discovered—but that electromagnetic energy emitted or reflected by neutrinos makes the stuff fluoresce. Perhaps—" he groped for a moment—"perhaps neutrinos are atoms in a special state of matter, and some of the atoms in the plastic are forced into that state by the pressure-moulding."

"Hm," said Lazar. "That would account for their ignoring us, anyhow. If it's true, it means that they're not dangerous to us and never were. Pity we can't investigate them further."

Rosoff started, thinking of the spare sheets of plastic in the compartment forward of the engines. "We can, though, sir..." he said.

3

Excerpt from transcript of verbal report made by T/Sgt. Elmer Rosoff to the AAF General Staff, Nov. 25, 1960. (Certain sections are deleted for security reasons.)

I WENT down to the airlock again and worked the hatch open. All I could see was space, but when I lifted the disc of plastic—it was two feet wide and pretty heavy, but I could handle it all right under those conditions—there was the ship again, as plain as day. It gave me a creepy feeling.

I took a deep breath and shoved myself off the lip of the hatchway. When I twisted my head around to look, it was just as if the *Conquest* were a balloon, and I'd pushed it away with my feet. I had no awareness of having moved, at all.

It was 13:20 hours by my chronometer, and I remember thinking that at 15:20 hours I wouldn't have any more air. Then I took a good look around—and, I don't know, it was

the enormous depth of space all around me, and the way everything looked either black or frozen, and the lack of sound, and so on...and a feeling I'd had earlier, that I didn't belong out here at all, that it was wrong for some reason... Anyhow, I fumbled. It was at least a minute before I could pull myself out of it.

Then I sighted through the plastic and aimed the other way with my reaction gun. I saw the gas streaming out of the muzzle and felt the recoil, but it still seemed as if I were just hanging there, and the *Conquest* had begun to spiral away from me slowly.

I didn't catch on until I noticed that the moon, down below, seemed to be revolving. Then I figured out that my grip on the gun was wobbly, because I had to hold the disc with one hand, and that had put me into a spin.

First I tried holding the disc between my legs, but I was afraid I might lose it; so I loosened my belt and jammed it under there. After that I was going to try to get out of the spin. But when I thought about it, it occurred to me that the spin was a good thing—I had to face one way to fire the gun properly, and the other to see the ship through the disc. So that's the way I did it. I wanted to keep as flat a trajectory as I could, so each time I turned toward the ship, I lined it up with a couple of bright stars, one near the nose, one near the tail. When I faced around to the *Conquest* again, I fired at it; when I could see the other ship, I'd check on its apparent position with reference to those two stars.

Then it occurred to me that so far I had no way of telling when I was at midpoint. I tried to guess by the apparent size of the alien ship, but no luck. I tried the *Conquest*, and that was easier. It looked about as big as it had across the launching site from the control shack, and I knew that was about a quarter of a mile.

I looked at my chronometer again, and I'd been in space for seven minutes. That didn't seem like long

enough, so I coasted for a while. I figured that I had plenty of time to decelerate, because I hadn't fired continuously up till then. About the third time around after that, though, the ship looked alarmingly big. I couldn't see all of it at once through the disc by now, and I realized that I had absolutely no idea how close I was.

After a while I thought of a way to find out. I took the cylinder off the reaction gun—it was about empty—and tossed it ahead of me.

It was pretty hard to see the cylinder against the glare from the ship's hull, but I watched it all the way. When I'd counted up to a hundred and ninety yards, the cylinder touched the ship—and simply went on in.

I stared at the place where I'd seen it last. For about a minute I was too stunned to think straight. Then I shoved the disc back under my belt, clipped another cylinder into the gun, and fired straight ahead of me until I'd used up the cylinder.

I took another look through the disc. As far as I could tell I wasn't getting any closer, but I wanted to be sure.

I had a thirty-foot line attached to my belt, with a small electromagnet at the end of it. It was no good for grappling, of course, but I tossed it out and it didn't touch. I kept reeling it in and tossing it out again while I thought things over.

One thing, I knew I didn't want to blunder into that ship without a little more idea of what I was doing. The ship couldn't be contra-terrene, of course, or the cylinder wouldn't have simply disappeared; but just the same, I didn't like what had happened...

* * *

ROSOFF wondered briefly if he ought to turn around and go back, ask for new orders... He discarded the idea. It would waste time he didn't have, and the whole difficult passage would have to be made over again—probably with no gain at all. Little as he knew about modern physics, he was the best-equipped of

the Army ship's crew to deal with this problem. Lazar had apparently read a good deal, but had no training; the other two were hopeless. It was up to him.

In the next instant, impatience almost mastered him. Out here, every second wasted was an incalculable loss. He wanted to go ahead and finish the job, but something too vague for definition held him back. He forced himself to think calmly and clearly.

Neutrinellos... a special condition of matter? a new kind of atom? Rosoff groped in the abysses of the mathematical universe, and found no foothold. If there were no possible contact between the ship's kind of matter and his own on the macro- or microscopic scale, he'd have no problem. But there was, obviously. The vital question was, how much, and what conditions governed it?

There were two general possibilities, to begin with. One was that the ship had come from a remote section of the universe. This was entirely possible; it looked capable of making such a journey; but the assumption gave him nothing to work on. The second was the contrary assumption. That one implied other such ships operating in this corner of the universe, other planets, perhaps other suns, other meteorites—

And the ship had been struck, apparently, by a meteorite.

It was a staggering idea, but Rosoff accepted it without question and went on immediately to the submicroscopic aspect of the problem. The matter which composed the ship was real; to its occupants, the ship undoubtedly had mass and solidity, was in every way normal. But in terms of the familiar universe, that matter did not—could not—possess any of the characteristics of "normal" matter. To the cylinder, the ship did not exist. Q. E. D.

Then, Rosoff decided, you had to drop another prejudice and accept the idea of an indefinite number of serial universes. The only workable explanation was that the alien ship belonged to another four-dimensional continuum; that the appearance coin-

cided with the actuality—the ship was not here, in this space. If you imagined the two universes as two indefinitely thin cards in a deck—

Not infinitely thin; indefinitely. You had to suppose some kind of structural arrangement that bound all the cards together into a deck; otherwise, for one thing, the alien ship might as well show up here one instant, beyond Arcturus the next. And that meant that particles under great stress could be presumed to have an extension into adjoining continua. An atom, say, would look like—Rosoff imagined a sphere with two collar-buttons attached to it. The tiny knob at the top, or bottom, would be all he could detect of the whole thing. A "neutrinello". To a member of the alien ship's crew, the big sphere would be all there was.

Except, of course, that you'd have to use at least nine dimensions to describe such an atom accurately...

ROSOFF felt the way he had when he'd evolved a beautiful new wave-quantum theory, which had taken his professor three days to explode. Careful there aren't any holes in this one, he told himself. More than a term mark depends on it.

He let his mind swing back to the final question: what would be the effect on "normal" matter of the particles that composed the alien ship? Apparently, none, so long as the ship moved comparatively slowly with relation to the "normal" universe. The atoms of his body, for instance, would pass readily between the much tinier and farther-separated units of the ship. Collisions would take place; their effect would be negligible.

But—

But it was slow-moving neutrons that triggered an atomic reaction. If the ship used atomic power, and he happened to pass through one of its engines...!

That might explain why the ship was here in the first place, so close to their own orbit. To the aliens, a planet of this continuum would be an area in space where atomic reactions got out of control. They'd de-

wise means of detecting such areas, and they'd send out ships to chart them...

Rosoff felt a little sick. Somehow his intuition had stolen a march on logic; it must have been the perception of this danger that had made him stop and deliberate. But the counter-urge to go ahead, to waste no more time, had almost been the stronger.

It's a good thing to follow your hunches, he thought—and then remembered that his dream amounted to the strongest hunch of all—and it was one that could not be followed.

* * *

When I thought I had it figured out, and was safe enough, I fired another blast and tossed out the magnet line again. As soon as it touched, I fired in the other direction, killing all but a little drift toward the ship. I let myself get within ten feet, and then killed the rest of it.

What I wanted now was some kind of an entrance, open or closed, it didn't matter which. I could have gone in through the opening left by the meteorite, but for all I knew, that would put me in the engine room.

I eased myself along the hull with the shortest bursts I could get out of the gun, and pretty soon I came to a place where there was a circular mark about ten feet across.

You have to understand that none of this stuff looked normal. I mean, the hull of the ship didn't look like metal, and this crack in it didn't look like a crack. What I saw was just a flat, shimmering, faintly violet mass, with a perfect circle drawn on it. There was no impression of depth...

I assumed it was an entrance. I lined myself up with it, made sure I wasn't drifting with respect to the ship, and I tossed an empty gun cylinder away. The gun was no good now; I had to improvise from then on. Incidentally, I would suggest that a set of small lead weights should be added to the equipment on those suits.

Well, I moved head-first toward that hull, and very slowly into it.

It was a maddening feeling, and I wanted to stop the worst way. But, of course, it was like going into nothing at all. The hull moved toward me—it had a sort of granular appearance and I could see it move when I was that close—and it passed through the plane of my disc, and then I was inside...

THIS PART is very hard to describe. It hit me all at once, and there wasn't an inch of it that was familiar. Over to one side, I remember, there was a set of what looked like spheres that had been stepped on before they had hardened. But when I looked again, I saw that they weren't just mashed out of shape, they were—Well, there was a reason for their being that particular shape, and while I was looking, it was perfectly clear. I mean to say, when you look at a part of a machine, for instance, even if you don't know what the part is for, you can tell it has a purpose. It was like that. But after I looked away, all I could remember was the squashed-globe impression.

All the time, of course, I could see empty space out of the corner of my eyes. It made everything seem unreal.

And when I looked upward through the disc, I could see a kind of complicated network—But it wasn't exactly a network either, because when I looked at it closely I could see that the parts weren't connected to each other, only to the bulkhead over me. And yet the longer I looked at it, the more obvious it was that the relation between the parts was what mattered. When I thought about it later, it was the same way—all I could think of was "network" even though I knew it was wrong.

I forgot to say that everything inside was the same as the hull in color and general appearance. Some things seemed to be a little deeper violet than others, but that was all. It was a little like a picture taken by infrared light, but that doesn't describe it. Nothing describes it.

No, sir, I didn't see anything that looked like a weapon. Like one of our weapons, that is. I couldn't as-

sign any function to any of the things I saw... * * *

...except the woman. Rosoff knew instantly, with an abruptness that left no room for doubt, that it was a woman. He stared at it, while the bulkheads of the corridor flowed very slowly past him, and wondered how he knew.

The thing's shape was as outlandish as anything around him, but much more complicated. There were portions that were almost spheres, and connecting things like rods pulled out of shape... Part of it was beyond doubt a head, and when Rosoff vaguely realized that it was in the center of the thing, the fact barely registered, and did not shock him at all. He could not see it clearly as a whole; he could only see his impression of it.

His impression was, that it was a human being, and it was beautiful.

He had already cut sections of rope from the magnet line, but he had barely presence of mind enough to pull one of them out of his belt and hurl it forward.

Twisting, the line passed through the alien creature's body and soundlessly disappeared. Rosoff's motion stopped abruptly as it left his hand. Gradually, as he watched, the creature's movements seemed to take on more meaning. Rosoff could almost persuade himself that he was watching an ordinary-looking woman in a spacesuit, making adjustments at a control panel set into the bulkhead.

He had interruptions of vision, during which the creature's body seemed as outlandish and meaningless as before; but these grew less frequent. When the creature revolved suddenly and shot off down a cross-corridor, the picture that remained on Rosoff's retinas was perfectly clear and ordinary—a young woman rather like his sister with an intent look on her face.

I FOLLOWED one of the crew down into what must have been their control room. I used foot-long sections of the magnet line, and it worked pretty well, but I had trouble

on the turn. I got into a room off the corridor that looked as if it were full of huge fans, revolving horizontally, and the blades apparently going right through me.

In the control room there were, I think six or seven of them. They moved around so much that I never could count them. All around the bulkheads there were sections that had thin, bright lines moving across them. Maybe they were television or radar screens. If so, maybe what I saw was the electronic impulses that produced the images...

There were a lot more of those complicated shapes, and I got the impression that the crew was under pressure—afraid, maybe, or at least working under stress. No, sir, it was just an impression, and I'll admit I had a lot of funny ones while I was in the ship... * * *

One of the creatures kept taking Rosoff's attention away from the rest. By this time they all had faces—not the same faces twice in a row, but he was never confused about which was which.

When he looked at this one, he always thought, *He looks like Grandpa*. The face it wore was usually bearded, and there was an impression of age, of lines in the face that stood for long experience, for calm appraisal and cool judgment. And there was something else for which he had no name, but which was infinitely reassuring.

This person was floating in the middle of the room, watching the bright patterns that flashed across the bulkheads, occasionally turning to speak to one of the others. Whenever there was a pause in the activity of the others, they looked to him.

For a long time Rosoff had had the vague impression of sound all around him—an amorphous murmur that was not really there, suggestive of the low whirl of machinery and the sounds of activity far off in the ship. The tiny hiss of the air valve in his own suit was perfectly distinct from this, and it annoyed him; he tried to ignore it.

Now, when the alien creatures

turned to one another, Rosoff had the distinct impression that he could hear them speak, although the sounds remained far-off and unintelligible. But suddenly, when the old man looked up from his work and his eyes stared almost directly at Rosoff, he heard these words clearly: "We have ten minutes."

That woke him up, a little. He thought, *My God, I must have gone off my nut. The faces grew slightly more vague but they did not disappear. Only by straining his eyes very intently could Rosoff see the enigmatic shapes behind them.*

He did not want to see them very much; what he was seeing instead, even if it was an hallucination, was too fascinating. The faces and forms of the alien creatures were still ephemeral, never twice exactly the same; but the individual character of each became more marked with every instant. There was the young woman whom Rosoff had seen first, there was the patriarch; there was an older man, who was sometimes a woman; there was a tall man whose eyes glowed darkly in an alabaster face.

When they looked at each other, love shone in their faces. They were not drawn into themselves, Rosoff thought, as a group of men would be in a similar situation; they were drawn more closely together.

4

ONE OF them left the control room, and I followed. I had trouble with the turn again, and when I got to the corridor I'd come in by, it was blocked halfway down by a door that had apparently come down from the overhead. I went through that, and the outside hatch was open.

I decided that the creature must have gone around to the break in the hull. I knew approximately where that was. I used the reaction gun again, and found it without any trouble.

He was near the edge of the hole, looking in with a sort of periscope. At least—I may be assuming too much, but that was what I thought at

the time. Anyhow, I got up beside him and looked down into the hole. It was as if I were in a wind-tunnel full of smoke. All I could see was this brilliant white rushing past me, nothing else. I didn't know what to make of it at first, and then I got out of there fast.

I was sure it wasn't what it looked like—smoke—because it wasn't visible until I got right over it. The only other explanation I could think of was that it was hard radiation. If I was right, it explained a lot. The meteorite must have done plenty of damage in the engine room—they had a chain reaction that was out of control.

The whole thing was due to go up any minute.

When I looked around, the alien was gone. I shot back to the airlock and got inside again. Just as I rounded the turn in the corridor, the whole troupe of them floated up and passed through me, one by one.

I followed them. Others came in from side passages, but I managed to sort out the ones I'd been watching before. Well, sir, as I say, I may have assumed too much, but I was sure I could identify them.

About five hundred feet down the corridor, they turned left. I followed them down a short side passage like the one I'd come by, and through a hatchway, but I overshot and found myself out in space again.

Before I could turn around and get my bearings, something bulged out of the hull and went tearing past me. I lost it, then found it again. By that time it was a long way off, but as I watched it, it swung around and came to rest. I aimed the reaction gun and took out after them. I know it was a foolish thing to do, but a lot of things didn't occur to me until later. Right then, I only wanted to be in that lifeboat.

No, sir, there may have been other lifeboats, but this was the only one I saw.

I got to it, finally—it must have been more than half a mile off—went clear through it and had to turn around and enter from the other side. That time I figured it correctly, and

stopped in the middle of the boat. It was small, compared to the parent ship, but I'd judge it was about ten times the size of the *Conquest*. All of the creatures I'd seen before were there, and a half-dozen that were new. They were all looking toward the parent ship, and I believe there must have been a port in that side of the lifeboat. If there was, it was as opaque to me as the rest of the hull.

I saw a little of the engines, yes, but they didn't make any sense to me.

* * *

THE TENSION was heightened in the control room of the small craft. Rosoff could feel it, material as the sheerest cobwebs, all around him. The aliens in the room were floating very near together, staring motionlessly out the side of the boat. Their changing faces, now more than ever, bore a single expression.

Rosoff saw nothing, felt nothing, but at a given instant he knew that the parent ship had blazed into extinction. He saw it in their faces.

He watched them with an intensity that held him motionless, barely breathing. Their faces were very clear now—strong, enduring, intent—and there was sound, even a tantalizing hint of color.

Rosoff knew he had only seconds left, and he strained to see, to hear, to understand. He saw the patriarch turn to the others, and heard him say: "Well, children; but we still live."

He saw also the patriarch's smile.

Now, strain as he would, the hint of color vanished slowly, and the faces blurred, the sound dulled. He could barely make out the young man's face against the distorted, incomprehensible pattern that underlay it. He heard,

"How far to the nearest..."

He heard, or imagined, the reply.
"...We have one chance in ten."

* * *

One of them moved over to the control board, touched something—and the lifeboat whipped out from under me.

I was floating in space. The disc

showed nothing but stars. All of a sudden they got blurred and I realized that my head ached, and my arms and legs felt heavy.

I finally figured out what was wrong, but I had to look at my chronometer to do it. It was 14:55 hours. I had about twenty-five minutes of air left, and the timer had cut down my oxygen flow. That was what made me feel so groggy. And, of course, I didn't know where the *Conquest* was.

I still remembered the constellations I'd used to line up the alien ship, and I had a general idea how far the *Conquest* should have traveled in its orbit. Just the same, it was a long shot...

* * *

Rosoff felt very strange and alone. He knew it would help him get his bearings if he increased the oxygen flow to normal for a few seconds; but it seemed like too much trouble. He didn't want to be distracted; he wanted to bring back the swiftly-fading memory of the aliens.

He conjured up a face which was almost one of the many faces of the patriarch; but not quite. The trouble with it was that it was only human; the patriarch's had been human-as-symbol, with the power and mystery of his alienage beyond it.

He felt a sense of loss, which grew until it was unsupportable. Once in a million years, he thought, I'll never see them again, so long as I live.

His dream had been right; it was not safe to look!

"For he on honey-dew hath fed,
and drunk the milk of Paradise."

* * *

I saw a sudden flash of light, and knew it must be the searchlight in the *Conquest*. I headed after it, aiming by the stars and compensating as well as I could for the *Conquest's* motion. After a long time I decided I must have overshot, and I turned around. Finally I saw another flash, not far away. My oxygen was giving out by then, and I don't remember much more. I think I slammed into the hull, and somebody came out and got me.

End of report.

Confidentials Preliminary examinations indicate that T/Sgt. Rosoff has undergone a definite personality change as a result of the experience described in the attached report. He is moody and shows more introversion than formerly; his responses to emotional situations are markedly distorted; and he complains of inability to sleep, impaired digestion and general nervous tension. There is a possibility that these changes are progressive in nature, and it is recommended that T/Sgt. Rosoff be subjected to further examination with a view to possible discharge for the good of the service.

Respectfully submitted,
Lieut. A. N. Clifford

12/13/62 * P. N. Sec., A. F. Gen. Hosp. *

A HEAD, through the forward screen of the lifeboat, only a handful of stars glowed dimly. Athor, the Eldest, with his children grouped around him, sat watching them. "When the Universe was young," he said, "that was what our ancestors called the Milky Way."

The youngest, Eldron, shifted his glittering, immortal body in a complexity of pattern which expressed resignation and hope. Completing the thought, he said aloud, "You yourself answered the pathos in that, Athor— 'We still live'. They never could have dreamed that the human race would come this far, still retaining its identity."

"Twenty-three people," signalled Otel, the next youngest, with a gesture that described the tiny ship and its occupants.

"Yes," said Athor, "and one star remaining to give us haven, if we can reach it. The symmetry remains. Shall we weep for the lost multitudes, children—or shall we honor them by living courageously?"

Eldron altered his life-substance, forming for an instant the image of Man as he was thought to have appeared in immemorial days—rigid torso and four limbs, the round head upon its short, strong neck, the whole vibrant with repressed and undreamed energies. "What would he think," Eldron asked, "if he could see us as we are now?"

"Surely that's a meaningless question?" said one of the others gently.

"I think not," Athor put in. "As you know, the 'Time' field is too powerful for us to use or alter; nevertheless, the binding extensions of matter do penetrate that field and can be detected over intervals measured by the Universal Rhythm. The distance between ourselves and the second Adam, across the temporal field, is correct for such detection; in fact, the mass of binding extensions we observed just before our ship was wrecked might easily have been that of a body known to him—his Earth, even, or his Moon."

"A strange thought," said Otel, musingly. "If he had been flying here at the correct time—and if he had had the necessary equipment—he might have seen us, the final product of his line. Who can say what the result might have been?"

Solemnly, they considered it. It was a kind of thinking in which they seldom indulged, the poetry of that late day being more rigidly centered upon reality; but the time was a special one. It was permissible and morally gratifying to construct a fantasy upon the second Adam, seeing that almost nothing really was known about that 20th Century human who had been the only male spared by the First Holocaust.

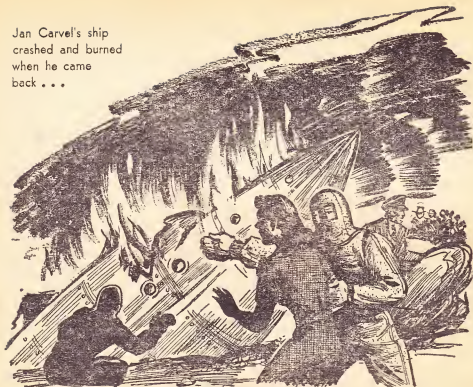
But Athor, whose knowledge and power of integration were greatest of all, formed in his turn an image more detailed and convincing than Eldron's, calling upon his incredibly ancient memories of pictures and descriptions more ancient still.

The others looked upon the image, seeing the strength and the bewildered passions that were in the young red-haired human's face. Speaking through those lips, Athor said, "I think he would only have been frightened and awed. Even we, who see the end clearly before us, cannot look upon the whole truth of the universe without flinching—and he was less than we are."

So saying, Athor returned to his normal shape—the shape which, if Rosoff had for one instant seen it truly, would have driven him into the furthest depths of insanity.

THE END

Jan Carvel's ship
crashed and burned
when he came
back . . .



(illustration by Lueros)

THE TERROR

by Alfred Coppel

The wars of nerves, the cold wars, of the early Twentieth Century pale into insignificance beside the fear that besets humanity when Jan Carvel returns from space!

FROM QUINTUS Bland's *History of Mankind*, Chapter XXIV "The Terror."

These are the halcyon years. The awful goad of the Terror is gone and men can look into the sky without fear. The new colonies thrive among the low red hills of Mars, in the icy moraines of Io, Europa, and Titan. Starships are poised on the outer moons; perhaps soon Earth will wear a diadem of stars.

Yet some of the bitterness of the

fear-ridden years is with us still. Forgiveness does not come easily to those who have suffered the humiliation of the Terror; there are the blighted lives to remember, and the unfortunates who lived and died under the threat of annihilation from the sky. Jan Carvel's memory is accused—for it was Carvel who brought the Terror.

Of the man himself, little is known. He lived—and died—in the first decade of the Conquest of

Space, or in the last decade of the Nationalist Era, since they coincide. A few short years had passed since the first successful Moon flights and the establishment of the Space Stations, and the tensions that had been mounting among the nations of Earth were nearing the breaking point.

Lunaris was 'Moon Base' then, and the launching racks were pointed back toward Earth and not toward the planets. Intense activity had turned the Moon into an atomic arsenal—a focal point of all the destructive arts men had learned during and since the Second World War.

The Old Countries, mainly the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, stood with weapons poised; the seemingly eternal Cold War steadily growing hotter. Moon Base was American, and the Space Stations were Russian; a parity of weapons had been reached and jingoists cried for war.

History does not record the exact date of Jan Carvel's departure from the Earth-Moon System. It is known that he was an American, a qualified Moon pilot, and a fanatic on the subject of planetary exploration. It is also known that he boarded an experimental long range rocket-bomber without authorization and vanished from the arsenal in Tycho. Some have suggested that he did not steal the craft and that he was actually ordered on his epoch-making flight, presumably in search of militarily useful information. This is unlikely. Having reached the Moon and turned it into fortress, the United States lost interest in space travel. Carvel chafed under the restraints placed upon him and the Bureau of Security; it is therefore more than just probable that he took it upon himself to press the cause of exploration without authority or sanction.

The result of this irresponsible course of action was predestined. Carvel lost his ship and his life. But he left a legacy that was to shake the world.

ON THE evening of January 17, 1971, some six years after Carvel's disappearance from Moon Base, the Pacific Radar Watch detected an approaching missile. It was tracked for routine interception, and one Ground to Air Missile was actually launched at it before its erratic course identified the unknown rocket as a space-craft in distress. Fortunately, the GTA Missile was caught and neutralized before interception occurred, and the approaching space-craft was allowed to crash in the middle of California's Central Valley near what was then the city of Fresno.

Search crews found the wreckage and it was immediately established as the experimental rocket-bomber stolen six years before by Jan Carvel. It was badly smashed by the crash, and in addition seemed to have sustained a considerable amount of battle damage.

A charred body was removed from the rocket and identified as Jan Carvel. The craft's papers, however, were in an excellent state of preservation, it being indicated that Carvel sacrificed his life to protect them. These papers, consisting of some photographs, some crudely drawn planetary maps, and a diary, were contained in a steel box addressed to the Secretary of Defense. They were rushed to this official without delay, fortunately he was at the time in New Washington, somewhere under the Great Lakes.

Within twelve hours, a meeting was held among the Chiefs of State of all the Western Powers. Two hours later, a special courier-plane was dispatched to Kuibishev, the new Russian capital beyond the Urals, and the greatest joint effort in the history of mankind was begun. The Terror had come to Earth...

* * *

From the text of the President of the United States' message to Marshal Vasili Kemprov, the Russian Dictator.

"...in spite of our differences. Therefore, I urgently request that you personally authorize the dis-

patching of qualified Russian experts to join in the scientific council now convening here to evaluate these terrifying documents.

"If you desire, hostages may be exchanged to assure the safety of your personnel..."

* * *

From the Carvel Diary.

I stood on the thin snowdrifts and looked westward, into the setting sun. The vastness of the silent desert was red with faintly visible plumes of sand that rode high on the icy air. Above me, the sky was cobalt and the stars shone bright and unwinking. The nearer moon rode low on the horizon, almost touching the tiny disk of the sun. I was alone, as I have been since leaving Earth. Nowhere on this world is there life, but here men might live and thrive, for there is beauty and peace.

Later. I have found a rich vein of uranium ore. The ship's converter will serve to refine it. I can go on. When I return, I will build a cairn, to prove that one man, at least, was sane.

Later. The landing was difficult, for the heat of the rocket-blast volatilized the frozen methane under me. As I let her settle, the ship dug a pit in the glacier and now she lies half buried in the yellowish ice.

I slept and fed myself and put on a pressure suit. Outside, the cold and the black sky pressed in on me, making me afraid. It is never dark here, for the planet fills the sky like a bloated yellow balloon. In the far distance, I can see a fault in the glacier, and the black rock of this moonlet shows through. I think there is silver in the rock. It streaks it in a pattern of filligree.

There is little here but the challenge of keeping alive. The cold depresses me and the giant in the sky fills me with vertigo. I shall go on.

Later. A giant ahead and a giant behind. The blackness of space is all around me, and I grow used to it. I sleep and eat little now and weightlessness is beginning to sicken me. I have come a long way.

The system ahead shows promise.

Later. I landed the ship on a wide plain. Rubble is everywhere. Perhaps this was once a moraine, but even the glacier is gone now. In the light of the sun I can see a rising fault like a palisade. Some low hills and a talus flank it. Bright colors are sparkling there. I think the cliff is thick with gem deposits.

Later. I do not like to leave this moonlet. It is small and friendly. The air is thin, but it makes the sky blue and not black and that makes me think of Earth. Perhaps I should be thinking of going back. The fuel is getting low and the air in the ship is fouling. It will take a long time to reach home.

Later. I will go on for a little while longer. I cannot help thinking that I will be the only one of my race to ever see these worlds. It is a godlike thought, but sad. At home there is nothing but hate and thoughts of killing. A great pity. The sky could be ours, if we were united.

Later. God have mercy on me! I have seen the face of doom! The great cratered plain that spread out below me was lined with ships. Great towering machines of war. We have waited too long, and now they have come!

I am a soldier. A bad one, but still a soldier. I know the look of an invasion base when I see one. This is what I have seen. I will take pictures. I must return and warn them at home. They have so little time to prepare.

Where have they come from? From the stars? They do not belong here. This tiny moonlet never gave them birth. Then whence have they come? And why? *I am afraid...*

* * *

FROM THE report of the UN Psychometric Evaluation Board.

"Careful study of the Carvel Diary indicates that it is in fact authentic. Apparently, the loneliness of a protracted deep-space flight shattered his mind, but his observations are in no wise to be disregarded for this reason. It is highly possible that the 'invasion base' was the culminating cause rather than the effect of Car-

The terrible years began with the return of Carvel's ship with its dread discovery; and people dreamed nightly of death from the skies...



vel's obvious psychosis. Further investigation is most definitely called for."

From the statement of Rep. L. Louis Frank, House Minority Leader, after meeting with Administration officials.

"... unquestionably, the people must be told!"

From Pravda, Official Organ of the CP of the USSR.

"The authenticity of the so-called Carvel Diary, at first doubted, has been established by Soviet experts."

From the Joint Resolution of the General Assembly of the UN.

"The nations of the Earth, in general concourse assembled, do hereby proclaim a state of grave emergency; and for the preservation of safety declare that the United Nations shall be considered a World Government, with all necessary powers to command the massed armed forces

of the member nations. The principle of unanimity among the major powers is indefinitely suspended, and..."

From the files of the UNESCO.

"...fleet of twelve space-craft under UN authority will depart from the UN Moon Base for Mars, there to establish a Military and Scientific Base. Personnel will include Hansen White, astronomer; Ivan Diagshaviliev, ecologist; George Washington Lee, radiologist; Consuelo Diaz, cartographer; Jules Feldmann, physicist; Kendo Higashi, psychologist..."

FROM THE report of the First UN Martian Expedition.

"...radar and watch station established and garrisoned according to directive 25-33. Bimonthly transport service has been established between Canopolis Settlement and Luna. Combined efforts by UNESCO and UT Armed Force personnel

are being made to establish satellite stations.

"It is strongly urged by the Project Committee that more personnel be sent to Mars, however, as a serious shortage of manpower has developed due to the feverish pace of the Settlement's growth. Colonization may be the answer.

"Nowhere have the UN patrols discovered any indications of previous occupation by alien forces. Nothing resembling the invasion fleet discovered by Jan Carvel has been located. However, the cairn mentioned in the Diary has been found, further supporting the authenticity of that document..."

Addendum in manuscript.

"Higashi suggests that the message found in the Cairn confirms the original findings of the UN Psychometric Evaluation Board concerning Jan Carvel's sanity."

* * *

From the message found written in pencil on a shipping tag in the Martian Cairn built by Jan Carvel.

"Welcome, my brothers!"

* * *

From the Founding Directive of the New UN Planetary Colonization and Development Committee.

"It being established that Mars and Europa are free of alien occupation, colonization of the areas immediately surrounding the UN Military and Scientific Bases on these planets immediately begun..."

* * *

From the statement of Delegate L. Louis Frank, Assembly Minority Leader to the World Press.

"...simply because we have not yet been attacked. I stand foursquare on my record as a public servant. If I am returned to the Assembly as delegate from the Southwest Area, I will continue to support the expanding military program. We cannot rest until all the habitable planets and satellites in the solar system are bases for our mighty cruisers. Only then can we be safe from this Terror!"

* * *

From memorandum written by K. Higashi to the Psychometric Evalua-

tion Board's Subcommittee in Cananopolis, Mars.

"...since I have been on Titan. Both here and on Io and Europa, we have found Cairns. Each time they contained the same message: 'Welcome, my brothers!' Has it occurred to any member of the Board that these messages were all written after Carvel's supposed flight in panic from the place where he spotted the invasion fleet?"

* * *

From a memorandum to K. Higashi, Base Psychologist, Titan Colony, from the Secretary of the Psychometric Evaluation Board Subcommittee in Cananopolis, Mars.

"It has. The pictures were faked too, were they not?"

* * *

FROM MEMORANDUM to Secretary, Psychometric Evaluation Board Subcommittee, Cananopolis Mars from K. Higashi, Senior Staff Psychologist First UN Triton Expedition.

"Yes. The pictures were taken on Titan, I think. We found a plain there similar to the one in his prints. You'll recall that the plates were all fogged—conveniently—by cosmic ray radiation. A little time and touching up took care of the rest. He must have been quite a natural psychologist himself, you know? He understood that people at home would just be looking for an excuse to abandon their suicidal hysteria. What he gave them was a common enemy. Had a lot of courage, too. Must have shot up his own ship and then wrecked himself deliberately, leaving the papers and the trail of Cairns.

"People will hate him when they find that he made fools of them, but I don't think they'll go back to the old life of before the 'Terror.' They will find out, of course. I suggest you break it to them back home. I'd like to be there to see it, but I'm too busy out here. We're building a staging base for the stars.

"I think Carvel would have liked that, don't you?"

THE END

★ Today and Tomorrow ★

IT'S more or less natural to assume, when you do not like something, that other people don't like it, either; this tendency shows itself very strongly in the letters we receive from readers. Few who have written in to express their personal dislike of the type of cover and interior artwork used in *Future* have been able to resist adding words and phrases to the effect that they "knew that the majority of readers felt likewise." There are two answers to be made to this line of contention. First of all, not *all* of the letters received (and the voting-coupons) have shown disapproval of cover and artwork policy; moreover, despite the encouraging volume of response to our request for letters and preference coupons, the totals do not represent so much as 1% of the magazine's circulation. Second, the cover and artwork policy is not set up by the editorial department, but by the gentlemen in the inner office who follow the returns; if several thousand readers wrote in saying they liked *Future*, but didn't go for our cover and artwork policy, this complaint would be heeded—or, at least, given careful consideration. But the complaints, as I've noted above, do not even show a clear majority of the votes that come in!

★ ★ ★

As I've stated before, suggestions and criticisms concerning the editorial content are read carefully, and where a complaint (such as continuing stories through the ads) is both reasonable and practical for action, I'm happy to make such alterations as are possible for the sake of general improvement. But I do not select the advertising; ads for pulp magazines are contracted for in blocks, for an entire month's group, and it is not yet practicable to have a separate advertising policy for *Future*. Nor can I predict any such change for times to come.

★ ★ ★

At this writing, many science-fiction readers seem to be much taken with a book by a well-known science-fiction author, L. Ron Hubbard. The book is entitled "Dianetics" and it calls itself the "Modern Science of Mental Health". Careful reading of this, admittedly interesting and well-written, volume shows no justification for such a heading. It is, for the most part, a curious combination of word-magic; sweeping assertions without evidence; flat statements of supposed "fact" which ignore, distort, and or merely contradict existing evidence; mysticism;

moral judgments disguised as reports of scientifically-established "truths"; slippery "definitions" of "mental health", which can mean many different things to many different readers, and so on. The basic contentions (discoveries) amount to a completely mechanistic oversimplification of the problem of personality disorders, and a claim for 100% "cures"—which is ridiculous ipso facto. (The author admits that his orientation is mechanistic, and does allow for inaccessible cases; but this disclaimer is outweighed in the barrage of propaganda technique proclaiming the wonders of the new "science".)

This is not to state that "Dianetics" is totally worthless, but that the claims for it are exaggerated to a dangerously irresponsible degree; it will take much time and careful research to establish what may be of value there. Meanwhile, reports indicate that already some persons have discovered that the volume's contention that *anyone* (outside of certified psychotics, etc.) is competent to handle this new therapy, has made for a deadly little parlor game which bids fair to bring forth foul fruit.

★ ★ ★

For the January issue, James MacCreigh leads off with "The Genius Beasts", which deals with the abduction of some Earthlings by otherworld beings. Only the beings who take away our people are, admittedly, not the dominant species of the otherworld; and the question is *who* or *what* is the life-form that rules this otherworld, and what is the purpose of the abduction? This description oversimplifies the yarn, but I think you'll find it thought-provoking.

Now, we shall test your signal reactions; we have on hand a short story by Richard S. Shaver. It is not about Lemuria, Atlantis, etc.; nor is it about little men in caves; nor, again does the world hang in balance. Nope—"Green Man's Grief" is merely a delightful little yarn about a gentleman who contacted a rather peculiar ailment.

Wallace West, who has been doing some topnotch science-fiction stories in recent months, will be on hand with his usual "different" novelet, this one entitled "The Everlasting Exiles". Edwin James is coming up with a sardonic little story entitled, "Slave Psychology". For the rest, we'll merely add that they're good, by my lights, RWL.—

MOON of MEMORY

by Bryce Walton

(author of "Earth Needs A Killer")

Barstac found it hard to believe that this girl had helped him escape — until he learned her reason.

BARSTAC walked the mile across the red Martian plain. He felt but little emotion as he reached the resort building, and the sports rockets waiting on the other side. He had to get one of those rockets and get to Deimos—or die trying. One would be about as good as the other.

Then a slight tension grew in his stomach and sweat began to run down under his helmet and pressure suit, down his sharp nose and the burned face, as he started directly for the sports rockets.

He saw no one at all at first, then the gray-and-black-uniformed cop not ten feet away. The cop's helmet tilted and curious eyes studied Barstac. Barstac didn't wait for any further reaction; his face pulled into a tight scarred grin as he fired. The kinetic energy release burned away the side of the cop's head. A scream floated past from some onlooker, intensified by the communicator in Barstac's helmet.

Barstac ran. He was almost to one of the rockets and exhilaration filled him. He sensed an alien thing, so alien—freedom. Maybe freedom just for a while. Then he heard shouts and saw men running in like spokes into a wheel hub. He threw himself flat behind a loading truck someone had abandoned enroute to a supply rocket.

Superson guns. They wouldn't kill him...against the law to kill criminals in the New System. More civilized to turn men into zombies for the rest of their lives in a mine three miles underground; they had to take him alive. A superson gun put a man out of action fast, but it didn't kill him. Sound waves tuned right could crack a man's helmet

open; in Martian atmosphere that meant unconsciousness in a few seconds.

If they got a line on him he wouldn't have a chance to use his heat gun. He didn't intend to be taken. He'd get a few of them, and then have enough heat left to turn on himself.

Barstac shivered as part of the metal truck spanged and cracked like glass. They'd got a line on him all right, fast. He fired and three men turned into smoke and red steam. The others disappeared behind rockets, sleds, and out-buildings; they could take their time.

A face appeared to his right. A man trying to edge away, but then he stopped. A tourist in a dude suit, all spangled and glittery, styled to the minute for Martian hunting. A face, young and pinched and shabby with fear. His arms dangled limply. His lips behind the helmet were tight with terror.

"Wait—" his voice sounded through the communicator. "Wait—please don't shoot! I'm unarmed. I won't—"

Barstac grinned. A gag. The guy was on his knees, raising a red hand, step back, lift a hand, and Barstac fired. A light charge right through the belly. The man folded to one side, his mouth stretching, closing, opening. He grasped his middle and blood ran through his fingers. He was on his knees, raising a red hand.

"Wait—don't—"

Barstac's next charge was heavier and it took off the man's head and helmet in a burst of flame.

Barstac was on his feet, long legs straining desperately, running. The sleek blue sports rocket slid across his path on its grav-plates. Far be-



(illustration by Luros)

Barstac's hand darted out fast, hooked the heat gun from her lap.

yond it rose the high cubed buildings of the City of Sanskran looking very near although it was at least fifty miles away.

A woman's face stared out at him through the rocket's translucent nose, a beautiful face inside a platinum helmet. Barstac didn't stop to think; he leaped upward, swung himself to the top of the rocket's skin and pressed the stud that

should open the cockpit. He grabbed desperately.

He screamed as he felt his helmet crack; they'd gotten a line. The frigid cold clutched his face. He choked for oxygen, tried to yell. He staggered back and collapsed across the top of the rocket.

He buried the opening on top of his helmet in his arms, released all available oxygen. It gave him a few

seconds, but he couldn't move. He dimly saw the girl raise up through the cockpit. Nothing made any sense then. She had the heat-gun in her hand and was firing. She was lifting him, throwing him over her shoulder, carrying him back toward the cockpit!

In this light gravity it wasn't a feat of strength. But it made no sense to Barstac. None at all. A woman he'd never seen, saving him. For what?

All the lights went out then. Barstac stopped being curious...

It was very still— somewhere. Very still.

PHOBOS shine came in through the plastex of the rocket and the controls were quiet in front of him. A dead sea bottom stretched away outside as far as anyone would want to see. Lichen and fungus, and a few of those big blind Martian beetles wandering, following the direction of the hurtling moon. And then Barstac saw Deimos rising, shining like a monstrous beckoning firefly through the night.

He felt a terrible lassitude. He just sat there, his head against the plastex looking out. He knew he wasn't alone in the rocket, but he didn't look at who was beside him: he stared upward at Deimos.

For ten years in that Martian Prison for Incurrigibles, he had planned escape. And the only escape was to Deimos. Once, a man could escape into the unlimited expanse of the stars; but in the New System, the nets were too tight.

The eery light of the double moons bathed the rocket as the larger moon joined the smaller. Deimos was his only hope, if any remained. There, they said, a man neither lived, nor died, ever again. The Martians were kind, people said. But who really knew?

The Martians had retired quietly to Deimos when the Earthmen came to Mars. They had a peculiar alien culture, nebulous and utterly inhuman. With their floating, wispy, mist-like shapes that suggested incomputable age, shapes the moons

could shine through, and their fog cities. No one bothered them on Deimos, a barren rock even Earth Companies couldn't justify exploiting. But the Martians had peculiar abilities. Inhuman they were, but they seemed to have great influence over the human mind and the nervous system. On Deimos, it was said, there were dreams for a man who had nothing else; anyone, even a man like Barstac, was safe on Deimos. Few ever came back from where only the lost went. And those who did come back, it was said, didn't remember.

And for Barstac certainly there was no place else to go.

Now, through circumstances beyond him, he had a rocket; he was away from the cops, and seemingly free. The girl—

His helmet had been removed. Out of the corner of his eye he watched the girl secretly in the other pilot seat, calmly smoking a paracette. Barstac saw the heat gun in her lap. He had a fondness for the weapon; it had taken him ten years to piece it together. The psyche boys at the prison with their intricate scanners had made a mistake with Barstac— maybe the only one they'd ever made since the New System, but even they weren't infallible; they hadn't uncovered his inventive ability, even though he'd always had it. They had put him in the shops down among the power tools and the atomic machines. Ten years was a long time to build a simple heat gun; it had taken patience.

His hand darted out fast, hooked the heat gun from her lap. She gasped, then sank back again and looked at him. She wore the regular sports outfit, the helmet, the thigh boots. An expensive piece of blonde goods, very expensive, with an oval face and pointed chin, skin light and very clear. She gave him a slow steady look that was like turning on a cyclotron. Her lithe figure reminded him. Sure, there'd been other—but so long ago.

"You can put the gun away," she said calmly. "Didn't I save your life? There may be trouble for me, but

Daddy Sayers can always buy his daughter out of trouble. My name's Marian Sayers. Whatever it costs, the excitement's worth it!"

Sayers! When Barstac had been imprisoned ten years ago, Sayers had been one of the richest robber barons in the system. Probably the richest by now. What would Marian Sayers want with Barstac?

SHE LAUGHED. It had a wild, odd sound. Her face had a wild look, too. "I heard someone say 'Barstac,'" she said. "And then I had to get you out of there."

"Why?"

"You were the most infamous man in history when I was a little girl: I used to dream about you. And all at once, there was an old dream, and I could make it come true, so I did. All the credits in the world to spend, and dying of boredom. I've tried everything, and found nothing at all, Barstac."

"You've tried—Deimos?"

"Even Deimos. No one knowing of course. But—well, they have some pretty interesting things, but still only dreams. This is reality, Barstac. Karl Barstac. I can call you Karl. I'll get out if you want and you can take my rocket. But—please! Take me with you!"

The vital animal warmth of her reached out to him and he put his arms around her and drew her close against him. He looked into her eyes and it was as if he looked into a book that was forbidden to him because of hidden secrets. His pulse pounded. She watched him mutely, only her parted lips trembled slightly. A small muscle at the corner of her mouth twitched. He slid his hands flat against her shoulders. Her lips parted and her tongue touched them for a moment. They were wet and glistening and she was firm and warm in his arms. Her head went back and she shut her eyes. He kissed her.

It was all right, he thought; then he looked above her blonde hair. She was probably cracked somewhere upstairs; filled with phony dreams of adventure and glamour

and the devil knew what; intrigued by the name of a guy who really didn't live anymore. Maybe she didn't know it, didn't see the graying hair of him the way he saw it, nor the face so scarred it couldn't register emotion any more.

And if nothing else, she was good for a hostage. It was still a long way up to Deimos.

"Maybe we can get away," she whispered, her eyes closed. "I mean into space. Maybe you could do some of the things you did in the old days. We could live—for a while. I heard that once you stopped a ship enroute to Venus and lifted twenty billion in credits."

Sure, he remembered. He smiled thinly, but he didn't say anything. He didn't tell her that the days of the Barstacs were gone for good.

Finally he said. "Sure, you can come along. And thanks for the ride."

* * *

He took the rocket up himself. They were pursued for a while, but the sports rocket was a lot faster than any cop wagon this side of Earth. Marian didn't seem to care when she saw he was heading for Deimos instead of outer space. He explained about the big nets out there, and of how they'd have to figure out a way to get through. She kept looking at him with a kind of awe, her eyes wide and deeply dark. She talked about herself.

"We'll hole up here for a while." Barstac said. "Maybe we can find a way through the nets. You—you don't have to stay."

"I'll stay with you, Karl, right to the end."

"You say you've been here to Deimos before?"

She nodded, never taking her eyes from his hard, unemotional face. "All my life I guess I've been looking for something. Maybe I thought I'd find it on Deimos. I didn't; I found release there. I can find real life with you, maybe the kind that flames so high for a moment, but is worth a full lifetime of mundanity. I can find life with you, Karl, if you'll pardon my being so for-

ward. Maybe it's death we're looking for, Karl. An escape from a system that's destroyed initiative. A system that's tied up the human heart in a bunch of laws and hooked them together into a big machine."

DEIMOS. A great barren rock, its soaring crags sharp as splintered steel. Masses of shadow dark as death, and splashes of brilliant color. And you spotted one of those misty, foggy looking Martian places here and there, wavering like something in a dream.

From the time the rocket settled on its grav-plates, from that moment on, things turned into a dream for Barstac. Marian seemed to know her way around. Not many had the guts to leave here once they came; but she had. A strong will there. An odd woman. One he would liked to have known—yesterday.

There was the music and the vapor that lulled him into lethargy, something like sleep, only it wasn't sleep. There seemed to be rooms, shifting, vague, translucent. And figures drifting like mist. He seemed to hear voices, but they were inside him, high, thin, like the sighing of plucked strings whispering in a low, dreaming distant key.

He heard Marian Sayer whisper. "Might as well enjoy it while we're here. There are dreams here, many dreams, Karl. Any you want. Rest a while, Karl, rest and sleep and later we'll plan what to do."

Yes, sure, he thought vaguely. *That's why I'm here, no not that. I'm here because this is the end of the rocky road, and no further for me.* He was drifting, sinking away, floating. He dimly saw her face above him, disembodied, her eyes strangely bright. The Martians were masters of something called mnemonics, he knew that. Masters of mental probing and the digging out of memory. Hypnosis or something like it, but way beyond that.

He was in a Martian city in a valley on Deimos, somewhere in a building, in a room. But he would never know the real shape of it, or what it really was.

Her voice whispered. "Karl—they understand humans; they don't hate us. They understand us better than we will ever understand ourselves. They know what we really want deep inside, and they can give us whatever it is. Don't worry about anything, Karl. I was here for a while, and I know about the dreams. I'll fix everything for you."

"Fine," he murmured. He was lying somewhere, he was floating—somewhere. It didn't matter where, not any more. Far away he heard her voice now. "Were you ever happy, Karl?"

"I don't remember. Happiness?" He tried to laugh.

"Can't you remember happiness, Karl?"

He whispered to her of things he had forgotten. Shadows and shapes appeared in the cloudy whiteness, ghostly and strange. Wavering outlines darkened and altered. He remembered. He hadn't for a long time, but he did now. In the asteroids where his Father had been a mucker, mining heavy beryllium, paired-atom stuff. And his Mother calling to him and he was running, laughing. Happiness. That was a long time back, and that was where happiness ended.

That was when the cops came and tried to take his Father for mining illegally and he had resisted. That was in the Old System, and they had shot him with an electron rifle. His body exploding, spraying the cold rocks with red and awful memory. And his Mother screaming and running, falling, drifting down a thousand feet into darkness, her screams fading...fading...

Marian's voice came to him, softly. Music sang too, poignant, eerie. Caressing, gentle, and indefinably sad.

"Poor Karl," she whispered. "Poor Karl." Dimly he saw her face, like a part of mist, and then he saw the gun reaching toward him out of the vapor.

Instinctively he started to reach for it, but he couldn't move. Drugged. He whispered. He felt

very tired, tired and old. "What's the play? What—"

"I'm going to kill you, Karl."

"Kill me—"

"I felt sorry for you; I still do. But not sorry enough. I decided to kill you back there on Mars, and then when you came here, I thought of something else. I thought you would reveal something, something that would justify what you are. There wasn't enough. You never had a chance, Karl. You knew happiness, but it was too long ago. We're alone in this room, left to our dreams. But I'm not dreaming."

"I wish I was," Barstac said.

"I thought that here something would show inside of you so I wouldn't hate you so much. But I do. I hate you more than I can tell you. But it's enough so that I have to kill you."

"Why?" he whispered.

I HATE YOU so much that I wanted to kill you. I knew if the police got you, you wouldn't die. And I think death is a worse thing for you under the circumstances than to be returned to prison. So I got you out of there. I knew that sometime I would get a chance to kill you. So here it is. You're dreaming, Karl. But I'm not—I—"

"All that—the things you said—you were lying?"

"Partly. You were a romantic figure once, and what I said about myself—that was only the way it used to be. The Martians are therapists, in a way. If you want to leave you can, but for most the dreams are better. I left. I began to live, then, Karl. I married two weeks ago. It was a beautiful thing for me; I loved my husband. But you wouldn't understand. You never got a chance to learn. My husband was the man you killed down there by the truck. Remember, Karl. The man who was unarmed, who didn't know what it was all about, who begged you not to kill him? We came to Mars for our honeymoon, Karl. I was waiting for him in the

rocket. He was coming to meet me—"

Her finger moved. Her face tightened. But he didn't feel anything. He heard her muted cry and then the voice as the Martian he had seen only vaguely before came back. The shape wavered ghost-like from the corner, and he heard the Martian again.

This is not a place for the old emotions. There is no revenge here. No death.

She screamed and screamed, her face twisting with hate. "I want to kill him! Let me, let me—!"

The Martian's thoughts were so calm and gentle, so old and wise. *Relax, and sleep for a while. Maybe this time you'll want to stay with us here forever.*

She didn't answer. Barstac closed his eyes again. He had remembered happiness, felt it, re-experienced it. And now he didn't want to die.

The Martian's thoughts were dimmer now, and Barstac drifted, and little fingers of crepuscular light fingered out toward him, alluring disarming, and he drifted back, down the slide-board of time where pain and ugliness were no longer.

Far away, the Martian's voice, talking to Marian perhaps, Barstac didn't know.

Humans are sick. The sickest ones eventually come here. More and more will come. Someday perhaps we can help all of you find your way backward or forward to happiness, and out of the old seas of pain. Sleep, both of you. Sleep. There is only the happiness that was, or that might have been. There is no more pain."

And then Barstac was with his Father again, running down the steep slope under the bright promising light of a million stars frosty and marvelously clear. His Father was laughing. His own wild abandoned joy as he ran beneath the cloud rifts where the sunlight showed, brightening the ragged tops of the asteroid's great metal mountains.

He heard his mother calling to him, and he ran faster.

Day of the Hunters

by Isaac Asimov

The little old man had a new slant on the mystery of what really happened to the great dinosaurs...

IT BEGAN the same night it ended. It wasn't much. It just bothered me; it still bothers me.

You see, Joe Bloch, Ray Manning and I were squatting around our favorite table in the corner bar with an evening on our hands and a mess of chatter to throw it away with. That's the beginning.

Joe Bloch started it by talking about the atomic bomb, and what he thought ought to be done with it, and how who would have thought it five years ago. And I said lots of guys thought it five years ago and wrote stories about it and it was going to be tough on them trying to keep ahead of the newspapers now. Which led to a general palaver on how lots of screwy things might come true and a lot of for-instances were thrown about.

Ray said he heard from somebody that some big-shot scientist had sent a block of lead back in time for about two seconds or two minutes or two thousandths of a second—he didn't know which. He said the scientist wasn't saying anything to anybody because he didn't think anyone would believe him.

So I asked, pretty sarcastic, how he came to know about it. —Ray may have lots of friends but I have the same lot and none of them know any big-shot scientists. But he said never mind how he heard, take it or leave it.

And then there wasn't anything to do but talk about time machines, and how supposing you went back and killed your own grandfather or why didn't somebody from the future come back and tell us who was going to win the next war, or if there was going to be a next war, or if there'd be anywhere on Earth you could live after it, regardless of who wins.

Ray thought just knowing the winner in the seventh race while the sixth was being run would be something.

But Joe decided different. He said, "The trouble with you guys is you got wars and races on the mind. Me, I got curiosity. Know what I'd do if I had a time machine?"

So right away we wanted to know, all ready to give him the old snicker whatever it was.

He said, "If I had one, I'd go back in time about a couple or five or fifty million years and find out what happened to the dinosaurs."

Which was too bad for Joe, because Ray and I both thought there was just about no sense to that at all. Ray said who cared about a lot of dinosaurs and I said the only thing they were good for was to make a mess of skeletons for guys who were dopy enough to wear out the floors in museums; and it was a good thing they did get out of the way to make room for human beings. Of course Joe said that with some human beings he knew, and he gives us a hard look, we should of stuck to dinosaurs, but we pay no attention to that.

"You dumb squirts can laugh and make like you know something, but that's because you don't ever have any imagination," he says. "Those dinosaurs were big stuff. Millions of all kinds—big as houses, and dumb as houses, too—all over the place. And then, all of a sudden, like that." And he snaps his fingers, "there aren't any anymore."

How come, we wanted to know.

But he was just finishing a beer and waving at Charlie for another with a coin to prove he wanted to pay for it and he just shrugged his

Carol sent me back to the
age of the big reptiles . . .
and there were little
lizards, with energy
guns, hunting them.



Illustration
by Luros

shoulders. "I don't know. That's what I'd find out, though."

That's all. That would have finished it. I would've said something and Ray would've made a crack, and we all would've had another beer and maybe swapped some talk about the weather and the Brooklyn Dodgers and then said so long, and never think of dinosaurs again.

Only we didn't, and now I never have anything on my mind but dinosaurs, and I feel sick.

Because the rummy at the next table looks up and hollers, "Hey!"

WE HADN'T seen him. As a general rule, we don't go around looking at rummies we don't know in bars. I got plenty to do keeping track of the rummies I do know. This fellow had a bottle before him that was half empty, and a glass in his hand that was half full.

He said, "Hey," and we all looked at him, and Ray said, "Ask him what he wants, Joe."

Joe was nearest. He tipped his chair backwards and said, "What do you want?"

The rummy said, "Did I hear you gentlemen mention dinosaurs?"

He was just a little weavy, and his eyes looked like they were bleeding, and you could only tell his shirt was once white by guessing, but it must've been the way he talked. It didn't sound rummy, if you know what I mean.

Anyway, Joe sort of eased up and said, "Sure. Something you want to know?"

He sort of smiled at us. It was a funny smile; it started at the mouth and ended just before it touched the eyes. He said, "Did you want to build a time machine and go back to find out what happened to the dinosaurs?"

I could see Joe was figuring that some kind of confidence game was coming up. I was figuring the same thing. Joe said, "Why? You aiming to offer to build one for me?"

The rummy showed a mess of teeth and said, "No, sir. I could but I won't. You know why? Because I built a time machine for myself a couple of years ago and went back

to the Mesozoic Era and found out what happened to the dinosaurs."

Later on, I looked up how to spell Mesozoic, which is why I got it right, in case you're wondering, and I found out that the Mesozoic Era is when all the dinosaurs were doing whatever dinosaurs do. But of course at the time this is just so much double-talk to me, and mostly I was thinking we had a lunatic talking to us. Joe claimed afterwards that he knew about this Mesozoic thing, but he'll have to talk lots longer and louder before Ray and I believe him.

But that did it just the same. We said to the rummy to come over to our table. I guess I figured we could listen to him for a while and maybe get some of the bottle, and the others must have figured the same. But he held his bottle tight in his right hand when he sat down and that's where he kept it.

RAY SAID, "Where'd you build a time machine?"

"At Northwestern University. My daughter and I worked on it together."

He sounded like a college guy at that.

I said, "Where is it now? In your pocket?"

He didn't blink; he never jumped at us no matter how wise we cracked. Just kept talking to himself out loud, as if the whiskey had limbered up his tongue and he didn't care if we stayed or not.

He said, "I broke it up. Didn't want it. Had enough of it."

We didn't believe him. We didn't believe him worth a darn. You better get that straight. It stands to reason, because if a guy invented a time machine, he could clean up millions—he could clean up all the money in the world, just knowing what would happen to the stock market and the races and elections. He wouldn't throw all that away, I don't care what reasons he had.—Besides none of us were going to believe in time travel anyway, because what if you *did* kill your own grandfather.

Well, never mind—

Joe said, "Yeah, you broke it up. Sure you did. What's your name."

But he didn't answer that one, ever. We asked him a few more times, and then we ended up calling him "Professor."

He finished off his glass and filled it again very slow. He didn't offer us any, and we all sucked at our beers.

So I said, "Well, go ahead. What happened to the dinosaurs?"

But he didn't tell us right away. He stared right at the middle of the table and talked to it.

"I don't know how many times Carol sent me back—just a few minutes or hours—before I made the big jump. I didn't care about the dinosaurs; I just wanted to see how far the machine would take me on the supply of power I had available. I suppose it was dangerous, but is life so wonderful? The war was on then— One more life?"

He sort of coddled his glass as if he were thinking about things in general, then he seemed to skip a part in his mind and keep right on going.

"It was sunny," he said. "sunny and bright: dry and hard. There were no swamps, no ferns. None of the accoutrements of the Carboniferous we associate with dinosaurs,"—anyway, I think that's what he said. I didn't always catch the big words, so later on I'll just stick in what I can remember. I checked all the spellings, and I must say that for the liquor he put away, he pronounced them without stutters.

That's maybe what bothered us. He sounded so familiar with everything, and it all just rolled off his tongue like nothing.

He went on, "It was a late age, certainly the Cretaceous. The dinosaurs were already on the way out—All except those little ones, with their metal belts and their guns."

I guess Joe practically dropped his nose into the beer altogether. He skid half way around the glass, when the Professor let loose that statement sort of sad-like.

Joe sounded mad. "What little ones, with whose metal belts and which guns."

The Professor looked at him for just a second and then let his eyes slide back to nowhere. "They were little reptiles, standing four feet high. They stood on their hind legs with a thick tail behind, and they had little fore-arms with fingers. Around their waists were strapped wide metal belts, and from these hung guns.—And they weren't guns that shot pellets either; they were energy projectors."

"They were what?" I asked. "Say, when was this? Millions of years ago?"

"That's right," he said. "They were reptiles. They had scales and no eyelids and they probably laid eggs. But they used energy guns. There were five of them. They were on me as soon as I got out of the machine. There must have been millions of them all over Earth—millions. Scattered all over. They must have been the Lords of Creation then."

I GUESS it was then that Ray thought he had him, because he developed that wise look in his eyes that makes you feel like conking him with an empty beer-mug, because a full one would waste beer. He said, "Look, P'fessor, millions of them, huh? Aren't there guys who don't do anything but find old bones and mess around with them till they figure out what some dinosaur looked like. The museums are full of these here skeletons, aren't they? Well, where's there one with a metal belt on him. If there were millions, what's become of them? Where are the bones?"

The Professor sighed. It was a real, sad sigh. Maybe he realized for the first time he was just speaking to three guys in overalls in a bar-room. Or maybe he didn't care.

He said, "You don't find many fossils. Think how many animals lived on Earth altogether. Think how many billions and trillions. And then think how few fossils we find.

—And these lizards were intelligent. Remember that. They're not going to get caught in snow-drifts or mud, or fall into lava, except by big accident. Think how few fossil men there are—even of these sub-intelligent apemen of a million years ago."

He looked at his half-full glass and turned it round and round.

He said, "What would fossils show anyway? Metal belts rust away and leave nothing. Those little lizards were warm-blooded. I *know* that, but you couldn't prove it from petrified bones. What the devil? A million years from now could you tell what New York looks like from a human skeleton. Could you tell a human from a gorilla by the bones and figure out which one built an atomic bomb and which one ate bananas in a zoo."

"Hey," said Joe, plenty objecting, "any simple bum can tell a gorilla skeleton from a man's. A man's got a larger brain. Any fool can tell which one was intelligent."

"Really?" The Professor laughed to himself, as if all this was so simple and obvious, it was just a crying shame to waste time on it. "You judge everything from the type of brain human beings have managed to develop. Evolution has different ways of doing thing. Birds fly one way; bats fly another way. Life has plenty of tricks for everything. —How much of your brain do you think you use. About a fifth. That's what the psychologists say. As far as they know, as far as anybody knows, eighty per cent of your brain has no use at all. Everybody just works on way-low gear, except maybe a few in history. Leonardo da Vinci, for instance. Archimedes, Aristotle, Gauss, Galois, Einstein—"

I never heard of any of them except Einstein, but I didn't let on. He mentioned a few more, but I've put in all I can remember. Then he said, "Those little reptiles had tiny brains, maybe quarter-size, maybe even less, but they used it all—every bit of it. Their bones might not show it, but they were intelligent; intelligent as humans. And they were boss of all Earth."

And then Joe came up with something that was really good. For a while I was sure that he had the Professor and I was awfully glad he came out with it. He said, "Look, P'fessor, if those lizards were so damned hot, why didn't they leave something behind? Where are their cities and their buildings and all the sort of stuff we keep finding of the cavemen, stone knives and things. Hell, if human beings got the heck off of Earth, think of the stuff we'd leave behind us. You couldn't walk a mile without falling over a city. And roads and things."

BUT THE Professor just couldn't be stopped. He wasn't even shaken up. He just came right back with, "You're still judging other forms of life by human standards. We build cities and roads and airports and the rest that goes with us—but they didn't. They were built on a different plan. Their whole way of life was different from the ground up. They didn't live in cities. They didn't have our kind of art. I'm not sure what they did have because it was so alien I couldn't grasp it—except for their guns. Those *would* be the same. Funny, isn't it. —For all I know, maybe we stumble over their relics every day and don't even know that's what they are."

I was pretty sick of it by that time. You just *couldn't* get him. The cuter you'd be; the cuter he'd be.

I said, "Look here. How do you know so much about those thing? What did you do; live with them? Or did they speak English? Or maybe you speak lizard talk. Give us a few words of lizard talk."

I guess I was getting mad, too. You know how it is. A guy tells you something you don't believe because it's all cockeyed, and you can't get him to admit he's lying.

But the Professor wasn't mad. He was just filling the glass again, very slowly. "No," he said, "I didn't talk and they didn't talk. They just looked at me with their cold, hard, staring eyes—snake's eyes—and I

knew what they were thinking, and I could see that they knew what I was thinking. Don't ask me how it happened. It just did. Everything. I knew that they were out on a hunting expedition and I knew they weren't going to let me go."

And we stopped asking questions. We just looked at him, then Ray said, "What happened? How did you get away?"

"That was easy. An animal scurried past on the hilltop. It was long—maybe ten feet—and narrow and ran close to the ground. The lizards got excited. I could feel the excitement in waves. It was as if they forgot about me in a single hot flash of blood lust—and off they went. I got back in the machine, returned, and broke it up."

It was the flattest sort of ending you ever heard. Joe made a noise in his throat, "Well, what happened to the dinosaurs?"

"Oh, you don't see? I thought it was plain enough. —It was those little intelligent lizards that did it. They were hunters—by instinct and by choice. It was their hobby in life. It wasn't for food; it was for fun."

"And they just wiped out all the dinosaurs on the Earth?"

"All that lived at the time, anyway; all the contemporary species. Don't you think it's possible? How long did it take us to wipe out bison herds by the hundred million? What happened to the dodo in a few years? Supposing we really put our minds to it, how long would the lions and the tigers and the giraffes last? Why, by the time I saw those lizards there wasn't any big game left—no reptile more than fifteen feet maybe. All gone. Those little demons were chasing the little, scurrying ones, and probably crying their hearts out for the good old days."

And we all kept quiet and looked at our empty beer bottles and thought about it. All those dinosaurs—big as houses—killed by little lizards with guns. Killed for fun.

THEN JOE leaned over and put his hand on the Professor's shoulder, easy-like, and shook it. He said, "Hey, P'fessor, but if that's so, what happened to the little lizards with the guns? Huh? —Did you ever go back to find out?"

The Professor looked up with the kind of look in his eyes that he'd have if he were lost.

"You still don't see! It was already beginning to happen to them. I saw it in their eyes. They were running out of big game—the fun was going out of it. So what did you expect them to do? They turned to other game—the biggest and most dangerous of all—and really had fun. They hunted that game to the end."

"What game?" asked Ray. He didn't get it, but Joe and I did.

"Themselves," said the Professor in a loud voice. "They finished off all the others and began on themselves—till not one was left."

And again we stopped and thought about those dinosaurs—big as houses—all finished off by little lizards with guns. Then we thought about the little lizards and how they had to keep the guns going even when there was nothing to use them on but themselves.

Joe said, "Poor dumb lizards."

"Yeah," said Ray, "poor crackpot lizards."

And then what happened really scared us. Because the Professor jumped up with eyes that looked as if they were trying to climb right out of their sockets and jump at us. He shouted, "You damned fools. Why do you sit there slobbering over reptiles dead a hundred million years. That was the first intelligence on Earth and that's how it ended. That's *done*. But we're the second intelligence—and how the devil do you think we're going to end?"

He pushed the chair over and headed for the door. But then he stood there just before leaving altogether and said: "Poor dumb humanity! Go ahead and cry about that."

CARIDI SHALL NOT ★ ★ ★ DIE!

by **Walter
Kubilius**

(illustration by Fawcette)

The relics of the Caridi civilization were the greatest archeological find in the Solar System. And they were right on top of the richest power-source mine in the system, too!

CAPTAIN FULSOM of the Solar Museum Expedition dropped his beam wand in despair. "It's no use," he said, discouragement in his voice, "Can't find the slightest trace of artificially-created structures. The radio waves reflect nothing but the same old crust of Pluto."

"Then those hieroglyphics on Mars..." Morely began to say.

"Fakes," Fulsom broke in bitterly, "If there ever was a civilization on Pluto we would have found a trace of it by now."

Wearily, struggling with the clumsy movement of their space-suits, they made their way back to the Rocketship Darwin.

Captain Fulsom was lost in thought, thinking of the millions in-

The being appeared suddenly before the astonished Bender . . .



vested in the expedition and wondering how he would face his colleagues back on Earth. A lost civilization on frozen Pluto! Even now he could see them laughing in the laboratories and museums of Earth. He could even hear them as they jeered.

"What!" they would ask laughingly, "traces of a lost civilization on icy Pluto? On the planet that receives 1/3600 of the sun's rays that Earth receives? So, Captain Fulson, chasing the ghosts of the past?"

A buzzing within his helmet interrupted his reverie. Someone was trying to call him. He turned around and saw, far on the bleak snowy mountain, a small figure leisurely waving a greeting to them.

"Must be one of the prospectors," Morley said, "hunting for barite-crystals, the source of atomic power."

"He's probably starving for a chance to talk," Fulson replied, "Here's hoping he hasn't got space-madness, or we'll never hear the end of his adventures."

"You can hardly blame them for talking so much. Some of them spend months all alone on a planet."

The prospector soon bounded up to them. He wore the usual apparatus. On his suit's legs were strapped pickaxes, rods and blasting equipment. On his back were two double-sized concentrated oxygen tanks; this meant he was prepared to spend more than a month away from a spaceship or camp.

He was an old man—they could see his wrinkled face and white-streaked beard through the visor of his space suit. "Hi ya friends," he greeted them warmly, "ya prospecting?"

His voice came weakly over the suit-to-suit radio. *H'm, thought Fulson, he must have been here quite some time. His powerized battery is almost shot.* "Not exactly," he said aloud; "we're from the Solar Museum. We're hunting for traces of lost civilizations on Pluto."

A flicker of suspicion shone in the prospector's eyes and then died away. He forced a smile to his lips.

"Scientists, huh? You don't say!" he cracked, "Use ta be a scientist myself. I'm the fellow who invented the automatic meteor-warner. Yes sir!" he added proudly, "That's me!"

Fulson smiled. The meteor-warner was invented by nobody; it was only the logical result of years of space-traveling. Each rocketeer who ever left the Earth added something—each giving what he knew so that others would follow in the dread recesses of space. But the old prospector was a pleasant sort of liar nonetheless.

"How long have you been here?" Morely asked.

"Nigh unto twenty years!"

"Twenty years! That's impossible! How do you get air, food and materials?"

"Oh, easy enough," the prospector said as his face wrinkled into a smile again. "I buy 'em from occasional prospectors and expeditions who come along. There's one around here every year or so."

"But suppose no one came for over a year?"

The prospector shrugged his shoulders and looked at the desolate scene on the Plutonian landscape. Sharp jagged mountains cut into a grim dark sky. Death was easy on Pluto.

For all he knew, Fulson thought, the prospector may have been telling the truth. When a man travels through space for a long time he picks up strange ideas—like spending twenty years on a piece of ice. But the old prospector was pretty sane; he could see that. No space madman had a sense of humor.

"Say!" the prospector said, "How about inviting me on board?"

"Sure!" Fulson agreed, ashamed that he had forgotten. When a man wears a space suit for a long time he gets tired. "Come on."

Arm in arm, chatting as they went, the trio stepped aboard the Rocket ship *Darwin*.

AFTER he had relaxed within the soothing warmth of the ship and had a few sips of the space-famous Mercurian tea, the old pros-

pector began to spin his yarns. Fulsom and Morely, discouraged after months of fruitless work on Pluto, were soon smiling again.

"Why," the old man drawled once more, taking another sip of Mercurian tea, "I remember the time I got lost in the rings of Saturn with the giant of a ship I had then! By Solar! But that was a time!" he chuckled, "I moved slowly, like a worm, and wiggled my way through 'em. I got out into space pretty well for a couple of thousand miles when I look around and what do you think I saw?"

"Haven't the faintest idea!" the two scientists said.

"Them moons were following me! So help me Solar! There was a string of them moons behind me! The Palomar Observatory checked up on my story and to this day you can see them on Saturn where my ship dragged them away. The Old Prospector's Strings—that's what they call them! Ah yes! Them were the days! A man could go out into space and start something or find something. Tain't like that any more. Barrite crystal prospectors everywhere!"

"But you're a barrite crystal prospector yourself!" Morley interrupted. The old man looked at him as if he was hurt.

"That's different!" he said, suddenly changing his tone. Morely and Fulsom listened to him in surprise. "I mean it!" he went on, "Barrite crystals are the source of atomic power. That's why everybody hunts for them. Even me. But do you think they'd use that power successfully? For the good of the system? Building a ship to reach the stars, for example? Hell, no! They build war rockets! Damn them!"

"Yes," Fulsom said soberly, "atomic power is a wonderful thing, but it becomes horrible when used in space-war; I've seen it."

They paused, each one in his thoughts. The old prospector, more than the others, seemed to be struggling with something. He found it difficult to speak. "You fellows,"

he began hesitantly, "What are you here for?"

"We're hunting for traces of a lost Plutonian civilization," Fulsom began. "Hieroglyphics on Martian ruins pointed this way. But we haven't found anything."

"I want to show you something," the prospector said, getting up.

He walked to his space-suit hanging on the wall and paused before it as if giving himself a last chance to back down. He squared his shoulders, and trembling hands rummaged through the suit's pockets till he found the precious scrap of paper. He carefully unfolded it and tenderly carried it back and gave it to Fulsom. "Look at this," he said, a touch of command in his voice.

Fulsom took it, glanced at it. Suddenly his eyebrows arched in astonishment. "This is the same type of writing as the Martian hieroglyphics! Where did you get it? Where is it from?"

"From the Caridi."

"The Caridi?" Fulsom and Morley asked, standing up; "what do you mean?"

"The Caridi," he said, looking up at them, "was the civilization on Pluto."

"Good Lord, man!" Fulsom asked excitedly, "Have you found traces, ruins?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "I found ruins."

"Then that's why you are here!"

"Yes," he added softly, "To see that no one else finds them."

"Are you mad?" Fulsom broke in. "If these Caridi ruins, or whatever you call them, exist—why, they might explain the entire history of the solar system! You can't keep such knowledge hidden! Where are those ruins?"

"Those ruins go back thousands of years. I might even say," he added hesitantly, "millions. But there's one damn thing!" he shouted. "Those ruins are placed right smack upon the richest barrite-crystal layer in the entire solar system!"

THE PROSPECTOR stood up and nervously paced the interior

of the ship. Fulsom and Morely watched as he gesticulated angrily with his arms. "Don't you think I wanted to have capable scientists examine those traces of the Caridi and help decode the inscriptions which have baffled me? Of course I did!"

"Then why don't you?" Fulsom demanded.

"Because they would have discovered the barrite-ore underneath! There's enough there to blow up the whole system. Do you think any one planet could have kept its discovery a secret? It would have become known and the damndest inter-planetary war would begin for the control of Pluto! Mars couldn't afford to let Earth control the ores and Earth couldn't trust Mars. Venus couldn't let either of them! And in the fighting that would go on here every vestige of the Caridi civilization would be destroyed!"

Fulsom and Morely were stunned. What planet would ever permit a leisurely examination of pre-historic ruins that would explain the dark pages of knowledge, while knowing that underneath it was an unlimited store of barrite, enough to enable it to master the solar system? It could not be done; one or the other had to be sacrificed. Knowledge would be destroyed by war.

"I think I know what we can do," Fulsom said slowly.

The old prospector looked at him and smiled, "Just what I'm doing?"

Fulsom nodded his head.

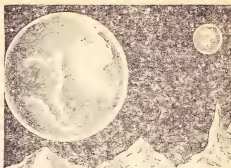
"What is it?" Morely asked.

"I could stay here," he said quickly, "and examine those ruins with the prospector. I'll put every inch of the planet under the microscope if necessary, but the secret of our solar system and its civilization must be discovered!"

The prospector and Morely listened intently while Fulsom paused.

"You," he said, to Morely, "could go back to Earth and say that nothing was found but a few traces which I am unearthing; that would satisfy the Museum. Above all, say that barrite-crystals are almost non-existent on Pluto. While planet fights planet, they must not come here!"

"We're not expected for six



months," Morely decided, "so I'll stay and help you."

"That's good," the prospector said, "Let's go to the fields now; I'll show you what remains of a great but lost civilization."

Fulsom went to the controls and the Rocketship *Darwin* blasted away. In two days they came to a gigantic sunken valley on both sides of which razor-like hills stood protectingly. The ground was like a multi-colored candy stick laid down between two mountain ranges.

"There was a giant upheaval on Pluto countless ages ago," the prospector said, "which exposed the buried civilization of Caridi. Each layer is the history of a million years."

The rocketship descended and rested on the dark frozen soil of Pluto.

SIX MONTHS later, the prospector came to Fulsom and Morely as they worked on a map, planning the next day's excavations. "I finished the translation of the inscriptions we found."

"Splendid!" Fulsom said; "the years you spent here were not wasted. Morely and I could never have decoded the simplest word."

Fulsom and Morely dropped their work and listened. This was a message from a people that were a million years dead when the pterodactyl screamed on Earth.

"Many were the tears shed in Caridi today," he read slowly, "for evil news has come from the third planet of our sun."

"That's Earth!" Morely shouted in surprise.

"...the colony of Caridi has fallen

to the ice! The brave men who gave their lives for the glory of science shall be ever remembered in the annals of Caridi. Our colony has failed. Few are the years that remain. Here, as on the Third Planet, the dark night of the ice awaits us...

The prospector put down the paper for a moment. "From here on," he said, "I can't piece the disjointed ideas together. There is only one idea which gives itself to translation. It is this: *'...the Caridi will be born again—on the Third Planet!...'*"

"They must have tried to colonize again, but failed."

"No," the prospector said, "the words are definitely *'will be born again'*. But that isn't all. This is what it says later on."

Carefully, testing the weight and meaning of each word, he read: *"...the intelligences yet to be born shall not remember Caridi. To them we shall be nothing but ruins upon a frozen planet. But Caridi shall not die! It will be born again! It will live silently in the memory of the Third Planet, always there, vaguely hinting and encouraging them to find their heritage underneath our ruins.... They shall remember, looking at the stars, only when their memory speaks in terms of hope and progress...."*

"That heritage," Morely said, "is the barriete crystals! The unlimited source of atomic power!"

"Not only that, but in those ruins we will find the accumulated knowledge of a million years—waiting."

"Those words, the Caridi will be born again, hint of something else," Fulsom said, nervously rereading the prospector's translations. "What is life? Is it something that is an accident in the universe? How did it come to Earth? Those life spores that some say came from the outer reaches of space—may not their source have been Caridi?"

"Some call it Caridi, others call it God!" laughed Morely.

"Did it ever occur to you," he said in answer to Morely's joking remark, "to ask why Earth has always been practically teeming with life?

Nothing ever evolved to civilization on Mars or Venus before Caridi or Earth colonized them! Only one planet in the entire solar system is immanent with life—and that planet is Earth!

"I still can't understand it all," he added, his brows hardening into lines of concentration. "But I feel that those frozen ruins outside, incredibly ancient as they are, may hold the secret of life itself!"

They were silent for a moment, awed by the full impact of the inscription they had found beneath the strata of Pluto. Each one felt his insignificance as he thought of the eons of measureless time that had passed since Caridi had known its greatness.

Their silence was suddenly broken. A shrill whistle from the control board filled the little room on the space-ship.

Surprised (for who would ever come to this graveyard planet?) they turned and watched a quivering needle on the dial.

"Space-ship approaching," Fulsom said softly.

STANDING ON the surface of Pluto, they watched the long, black space-ship descend. When the rockets had sputtered and died the trio, dressed in their heavy clanging space-suits, approached the strange ship, half in wonder and half in fear.

It was battered and worn, a space-ship that had seen many years of service in the lanes. There was something else that made them uneasy as they approached. From port-holes on the ship peered ominous and powerful gun nozzles.

The air-lock opened and three men stepped forward. The first one held nothing in his hand but a metallic roll; the other two were armed. Only a short distance separated them from Fulsom, Morely and the prospector. The leader motioned with his arm that he was ready to speak.

"Who are you?" Fulsom heard the gruff voice through the microphone of the space suit.

"Captain Fulsom on the Solar Museum. And you?"

"What're you doing here," the stranger said, ignoring the question, "prospecting?"

"Yes," Fulsom answered sharply; "Is it any of your concern?"

"Looking for barrite crystals in this valley I suppose?"

"No. There is nothing here of commercial value to interest you. We're examining ancient ruins of a pre-historic civilization."



The stranger laughed out loud and then cut it short with an angry snarl. "Got a claim?"

"No. We don't need a claim. This is a scientific expedition from the Solar Museum of Earth. Who are you and what do you want?"

"My name is Bender," he answered. "Have no claim, eh? Well, you need a claim to touch land in the Solar System. Planetary Courts say so. I got a claim, a mining claim, for barrite crystals. That old buzzard there," he said, pointing to the prospector, "was around when I first laid my ship down on this valley two years ago. I recognize him."

"But I got a claim now," he shouted, brandishing the metallic roll before them; "now get the hell off my land before I order the three of you shot down!"

"You can't get away with this, Bender," the prospector broke in. "There's important work going on here! You'll smash those ruins in order to get to the barrite crystals. You can't do that! Those ruins are important to science!"

"Damn science! Get off my land!"

"I'll appeal to the Planetary Courts," said Fulsom; "there are laws prohibiting the destruction of archaeologically valuable land."

"It will be six months by the time you get to a court," Bender sneered.

"By that time I'll have enough ore ready to buy out every court from here to the sun."

"You'll pay for this," the prospector said evenly, "I'm warning you!"

"See those guns on my ship? They're trained on yours. If you are not back in it within twenty minutes and set off from this valley, I'll blast your ship to pieces—and you too for that matter."

Fulsom and Morely, hopelessly furious with rage, cursed the fact that there was not a single gun on the *Darwin*. Turning away, the trio made their way slowly and despairingly to the ship. Oddly enough, the old prospector didn't seem to mind; he smiled grimly to himself as he trudged along.

Within the *Darwin* Captain Fulsom paced the floor, pale with anger. "It takes millions of years," he raged, "to discover all that science has achieved in those ruins, and they'll be destroyed in six months by a bunch of barrite-stricken, power-mad fools!"

"We better start going," the prospector said; "we have only a few minutes."

"We can—" Morely began, and then stopped.

"We can what?" Fulsom demanded.

"We can ram them," Morely said quickly, "That will prevent them from destroying the ruins. Only one is needed—"

"I'll be the one!"

"No," the old prospector broke in, "there's not a chance. The ship would be shot down before it got near enough. Set the motors."

"Where to and why?"

"Up to the highest mountain so we can get a complete view of the valley. I'm going to show you what happened to me twenty years ago."

"What in the world are you talking about?" Fulsom asked, irritated.

"You'll see. I would have told you before, but you would not have believed me."

MORELY turned on the power and within a few moments the rocket blasted its way upward. When it was several thousand feet above the surface of the planet they levelled off and shot across the giant valley to a great peak in the distance. Near it they stopped and brought down the ship to rest upon the mountain top that overlooked the plain.

"Focus your telescope and watch Bender and his mob," the prospector ordered.

"I still don't get what you're driving at," Fulsom said, but both he and Morely obeyed. They aligned the telescoping sights so that a clear picture of Bender's rocket ship and his men could be seen. The black rocket was like a rotten egg lying upon a colored sea of sand.

Bender and six men, evidently the entire crew, were outside the ship. They quickly separated, each armed with a barrite-rifle and each holding a beam wand. Obviously they were losing no time for the blasting would soon begin. The seventh man, who wheeled a small carriage, was the man who would place the charges in the ground before setting them off.

As Fulsom and Morely watched, the old prospector spoke.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "I did the same thing. What will happen to Bender and his men, happened to me. Watch."

Like seven small insects Bender and his men scurried around the ship, jubilant that underneath their feet lay an ore that would make them the most powerful men on Earth. Nothing could be seen in the entire valley but the ship and the seven dark men.

"I lied to you when I said I came here with my own ship," the old prospector continued, "I came here twenty years ago on the *Balter*. It's on the other side of this mountain range now. Ours was a prospecting expedition; we were hunting for barrite-crystals, just like Bender is doing. I was captain and we found

that the whole valley was situated on a gigantic layer of crystals. I ordered one of my men to begin blasting..."

Bender could be seen, however dimly, waving to one of his men. The man with the carriage rolled up to him. Bender pointed to a section of the valley to which the man quickly made his way. The man with the carriage bent down, removed his tools and plunged them into the earth.

"He's boring a hole before blasting," Fulsom said to Morely.

"Look!"

One moment ago the valley was empty but for seven men. But now there was a eighth!

She materialized suddenly before Bender and the man who was preparing to set the blast. Her skin was dark and shone with a faint luminosity. She stood erect, a head taller than the brawny and muscular Bender.

Bender reeled back in surprise. The kneeling man stood up and walked back a few steps, stunned.

Bender must have recovered from his surprise for he moved forward a few hesitant steps toward the strange being.

They stood gazing at each other for a moment, and then Bender's arms slowly went up. The palms of his suit-encrusted hands pressed against the sides of his head and his knees buckled under him as if he were in great agony.

"For God's sake, man!" Fulsom shouted to the prospector, "explain what's going on!"

"Telepathy," he said, "There is no international language, so thoughts must be translated into words. The Caridi just drained Bender's mind of all his knowledge. Painful."

"Is that what happened to you?"

"Yes. All I got was one message: *Do not blast. These ruins are precious. There is knowledge in them.* The sudden pain passed. I turned to tell my men to remove the blasting. They laughed at me and..."

"She's saying something to his men!" Morely shouted. Fulsom and the old prospector turned and looked through the telescreen in time to

see the figure of Bender facing his men.

An order was given. Immediately the five who were armed unbuckled their rifles and aimed them at the strange being.

They were waiting only for Bender's command to fire.

BENDER faced the thing again and both stared into each other's eyes. No word could be heard by the three who watched the scene from the top of the mountain, but they could sense that a battle raged between them.

One minute had passed when it appeared that the exchange of thoughts was finished, but not to the satisfaction of Bender.

He turned and spoke to his men. At an order from him their guns spat flame.

The barrite-rifles flashed. At the apex of the bullet stream from five rifles, was the being—unharméd! She stood, unscarred and untouched, as shot after shot bounced helplessly off him.

Panic-stricken, Bender's men

dropped their guns and ran frantically to the air-lock of their ship. It was a race that doomed them from the beginning, for as each one ran past the being, a ray of white light flowed from her eyes.

As the rays touched each man he fell clumsily and became nothing but a mass of dead flesh and hot metal as he struck the ground. Six were killed in as many seconds.

Bender stood his ground and did not move. Whether he was too terrified to flinch or whether he was a man who faced death as he had lived life—cold-bloodedly, the three men in the *Darwin* could not tell.

When Bender's withered body collapsed on the frozen soil of Pluto the strange being turned and looked toward the spaceship in which Fulson, Morely and the old prospector sat.

It raised a hand in silent recognition and then disappeared.

"That being will never be seen again," the old prospector whispered as it faded away, "Its task is finished."

[Turn Page]

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FULSOM turned to the old prospector who stood behind him, looking at the dark valley.

"Who are you?" he asked softly.

"Just an old prospector," the old man smiled, "who remembered."

"I—I can't understand it," Fulsom said, "Who was that being? Could the Caridi foretell the future? Did they—did they know we were coming? I feel as if it is all really quite simple, that one fine day every single thing that baffles us now will be clear. It's like—like trying to recall something important that had slipped your mind."

"It takes time for a race to remember," the prospector said.

"Why do you say, 'remember'?"

"Isn't that as good a word as any? A man remembers his childhood. Why shouldn't a race remember its own? But here is a translation of the inscription on the last wall of one of the Houses of Science we excavated. I did not want to show it to you before."

He took out a small piece of pen-

cilled paper and read: "*The three shall descend from the roof of the mountain and continue the work. They shall clear away the valley and bury the dead. And one of them shall say, I have remembered!*"

"*Yes! Beings of the Third Planet! You will remember! The suns grow and die in cycles that never know an end. And each star and planet, like each individual life you live, will someday become still. But we shall not die!*"

"*When your planet, like ours, feels the approach of death—fling the torch of life across the stars!*"

The old prospector folded the piece of paper and gave it to Fulsom. "I translated that yesterday."

"Is there more?"

"Perhaps there is," he answered, smiling, "but we will get to the rest later."

It was sunrise on Pluto as the three men descended into the valley, bearing in their hands the scrap of paper.

THE END

(This story has been reprinted by popular request.)

Did you think the cover was better than last issue's?

as good as last issue's? not as good?

Did you think the artwork was better than last issue's?

as good as last issue's? not as good?

Did you find the stories better than last issue's?

as good as last issue's? not as good?

Were there any stories in this issue you did not like?

Nominations for Reprint (Stories should not be over 5000 words, and should have appeared in old issues of Science Fiction, Future, or Science Fiction Quarterly.)



This department is for you, the readers, where you can discuss science and science fictional subjects in general, and your opinions of *Future* in particular. We will pay two dollars for each letter published, regardless of length.

Dear Editor:

You have Fritz Leiber to thank for this letter, the first I've written to a science fiction magazine. His "Martians, Keep Out!" is one of the best. The anti-discrimination theme is one that has hardly been scratched in this field, and could stand a lot of amplification.

The next most impressive facet of the July issue was the Lawrence illustration. Hope you will have more of his drawings. I rate them A1, and instinctively buy any magazine with the fine hand of Lawrence in evidence. The others were good, though. Would recommend Asterita if you can get him. I guess there's no use expostulating with you about Bergey. I have spent some time trying to puzzle out what goes on in the minds of the women on the covers he paints, from the expressions on their faces. (No way to find out in the stories, usually.) The answer must be: *nothing*. Maybe you would let him point his ladies in the other direction, for a change, or have them wear masks—or let him read the stories first.

The other stories, and the departments, all struck me as good, competent reading, somewhat above average. The price is agreeable, as is the size. Am interested in what sort of letters this \$2.00 rate will bring in. So far, they seem good. (Hmmm

If this is published, I'm making only one cent per word, or less—had better quit.)

It looks from here as though you have the makings of a first-rate magazine. If you can keep up your present quality, and perhaps add a few writers like Asimov, Heinlein and the like, and/or get some good new blood, you are in with me. Good luck.

Robert C. Petterson
c/o Chemistry Department
University of So. California
Los Angeles 7, California

(So far, we haven't noticed any "but-tering" of opinions in letters received. The knocks and boosts alike seem to be pretty forthright. RWL)

* * *

Dear Editor:

Upon looking over the letter column in the second issue of *Future*, I came to the conclusion that you were afflicted with a New York complex, or something. All the letters published therein are from New York City, or somewhere in the same state. But, later, through a super-human concentration of thought, I reasoned that you had to meet a deadline, and the letters from New York were the only ones which arrived in time. Or maybe you're patriotic to your state, and want to keep all those

two-dollar payments within it. But, if I ever get one, it will stay in New York anyway, because I'll buy two subscriptions to *Future* with \$1.80 of it and let the other 20c go on one of the "Lucky Pirate Rings" advertised on page 90 (just what I need).

Well, since you said that you'd cater toward letters with meat in them (please find enclosed one slice of bologna), I'll try to put some in this one.

First off, with a question that has been bothering me lately:

Resolved—that all of us who consider ourselves old-time science fiction fans, and, in fact, compact fandom itself, will be swamped by the hordes of newcomers resultant of the increased popularity of science fiction, the new magazines, books, movies, radio programs, etc.

The floor (letter column) is now open for debate.

Pessimist:—Just look at all the new developments in science fiction lately. For the past few months, every month, a new magazine has appeared. There are so many now that fans (except those who complain about reading a copy of *Amazing Stories* in two hours) cannot hope to keep up with them all. And, worse yet, more are on the way! Is the science fiction field to be flooded with scores of publications until it becomes the equal of the Western, Romance, and Detective classifications? Are there to be more and more movies, books, and radio programs? Will the deluge of popularity continue on an upward climb? Yes, I think it will. I think that by 1999 there will be no such thing as fandom, fan magazines, or science fiction conventions. And my assumption is based on fact; not on selfish or unfounded thinking.

Optimist:—I grant that science fiction is on an upward swing, and that there is a danger of the field being flooded with too many magazines, movies, etc., but fandom itself is in no crisis. Look at the thousands of people who read science fiction today. How many of them are active or semi-active fans? Only about one fifth, if that. Therefore, I think that there will not be enough people among the new-coming multitude, who will be interested enough to write letters to the magazines, take part in the publication of fan magazines, and attend conventions, really to hurt fandom and fans. Besides, fandom needs some new blood. Lots of authors have de-

veloped from the science fiction fan field, and, goodness knows, fandom needs some new authors with new ideas. I contend that the increase will be good for fandom, rather than detrimental to it.

Pessimist:—In other words, you say that you want us old-and-tired fans to be kicked out, along with hundreds of hard-working guys who make their living plugging away incessantly at a typewriter, with the fact that they have a wife and six kids to support spurring them on. You want *them* to be shoved out of a job.

Optimist:—Most authors have enough sense to stay away from the opposite sex and, therefore, don't have any wife or kids to support. Anyway, perhaps some of them need to be kicked into other fields.

Pessimist:—That may be, but you haven't said anything to make me alter my opinion that fandom is doomed—not in the least.

Optimist:—Well, if I can't, nobody can; but maybe some other fan can try. Come on, fellows, sic 'im!

Well, there's your meat. I hope it will give you and the readers something to chew on for awhile. ... Thanks for putting the name of the illustrator at the beginning of the story. With some magazines, it's just a guessing process.

I would like to see a fan magazine review in *Future*, as well as a longer letter column.

Tom Covington
315 Dawson Street
Wilmington, North Carolina

(Where but in science fiction could we find a deluge taking an upward climb? Thanks for the meat; we'll let you other readers chomp on it. Meanwhile, we'd like to see some of these "most authors" who are supposed to have "enough sense to stay away from the opposite sex", if you want to call that "sense". You understand that the rolling pin my wife is holding over my head has nothing whatsoever to do with my opinions on the matter. RWL)

* * *

Dear Editor:—

Two stories in your July issue struck me as being particularly interesting, since they represent two basically different assumptions about the future. One, "Barrier of Dread", by Judith Merrill, assumes important changes in human behaviour—perhaps even in human nature—in that the irra-

tional elements of motivation will have disappeared. In this kind of future story, humanity still fights, but it isn't fighting amongst itself; the culture is a sort of utopia—though not in any way perfectionist—without being decadent in that ambition, or drive, or whatever you want to call it has vanished along with war, etc.

The other story, "Shadows of Empire" by Lester del Rey, assumes that no such change will take place, so that the future follows pretty much along the same general lines of expansion and decay, in cultures, as the past. History repeats itself, though never exactly—just the same sort of things happen again and again and again.



Being part of the second kind of civilization myself, as we all are, I found the del Rey story more believable, much as I enjoyed the Merril; but it's good to see stories with the basic assumptions of "Barrier of Dread", and I hope this first of its kind in *Future* won't be the last.

Jay Tyler
127 East 28th Street
New York, NY

(The "Barrier of Dread" type of story is hard to write, just as a convincing "superman" story is difficult—it takes a "superman" to know how the being is likely to operate! RWL)

[Turn Page]

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Dear Editor:—

Having finally escaped the confines of
my straight-jacket (my parents just don't
understand about science-fiction) I am now
free to give lucky you a glimpse or two of
my valuable thoughts.

First off, I must here and now take ac-
tion to crush this insane movement to
print articles in *Future*. There are regular
journals published for the express pur-
pose of printing science articles. These
journals may be easily obtained at practi-
cally all school and public libraries. Sub-
scriptions to these periodicals are available
for the benefit of those unfortunate her-
mits who are completely isolated from
school and public libraries. Any such her-
mits who are so destitute as to be unable
to afford the price of a subscription
should be occupying themselves with seek-
ing employment instead of loafing about
their secluded caves reading *Future*. It is
therefore un-necessary that *Future* bore its
readers with science articles. If you are
personally possessed with an irresistible
urge to print such articles, please put out
some other magazine for that purpose and
leave *Future* uncontaminated.

Only one exception to this banning of
science articles should be observed. If an
article is of such an unusual nature that
the regular scientific periodicals hesitate
to accept it, then it might qualify for *Future*.
For instance, if somebody comes up
with an idea for time-travel, with some
evidence that he might be right, an article
about such a theory would be sufficiently
off-trail to warrant its being in *Future*.
But please, leave use not be printing ar-
ticles about every new application of chemi-
cal hair wash and electronic mouse traps
that happen to come along.

Just one comment on your second issue
before I leave you. How did you ever
evolve that sneaky plan for getting the
cover to illustrate a story? Undoubtedly
that was the lowest trick ever conceived
by any editor in the business! In no way
can the reader complain that the cover
does not illustrate Judith Merrill's story,
but he still must contend with the frustrat-
ing, helpless feeling that he has been
frauded in the deal. This is unfair! It is
the reader, not the editor, who should have
the upper hand. In protest of this topsy-
turvy arrangement, I shall prevent the
sale of your next issue by picketing the

corner newsstand—after I have purchased my copy, of course.

—Wally Weber,
Box 13,
Ralston, Washington.

(Shucks, and we were all ready to run a five-part serialized article on creative paleontology! Well, that does it; no articles. ... Seriously, the general response agrees with yours, Mr. Weber. But, sirrah, we protest, we quail, at the thought of your picketing the corner newsstand in rain, sleet, hail, fog, and gloom of night alone; best you should obtain assistance. Get several hundred stalwart aides to side you in your noble task—after they've purchased their copies of *Future*, of course. RWL)



Dear Editor:—

Haven't had a chance heretofore to write and give my opinions on the re-appearance of the old *Future*, so I'll take this opportunity to do so. The appearance of a new science fiction magazine of the newsstands is naturally an occasion of rejoicing, but when a pulp like *Future* comes along, edited by an old-time fan, the rejoicing should redouble. With one at the helm who should know the sort of magazines that fans want, there's no limit to the heights of popularity it can reach.

And you've made a good start! The first issue had competent stories, marred by horrible artwork. This issue shows you have acquired Finlay and Lawrence, two of the best pulp illustrators going. While

{Turn To Page 95}

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their respective techniques are not too well fitted to science-fiction—and one could dream of Cartier, Rogers, or O'Hara—still they are better than nothing. Considerably so.

By the way, how did you lure Bergey away from his usual haunts—and one might ask *why*?

You also seem to be luring a stable of first-rate word-slingers from their accustomed habitats, too. Leinster, Del Rey, G. O. Smith, Leiber, de Camp, and Poul Anderson, Leinster's novel was the best of the lot. He could write about Politics in East Weehunk or Diseases of the Horse, and still (with his smooth technique of putting words together) be interesting, entertaining and thought-provoking.

Lester del Rey's short was next best, with an intriguing idea. Not as good as "The Stars Look Down", but good enough.

The departments are competent, but could stand enlarging. Book Reviews, for instance. A good-sized Editor's Page would be nice, too. The G. O. Smith entry failed to click with me, for no reason I can put my hands on. The plot seemed reminiscent of Ray Cummings, and very improbable. Better luck next time. Smiff

Oh, by the way, the cover was revolutionary. Do you realize, Mr. L., that this is possibly the first time in the History of Science-Fiction that a cover illustrated in detail a scene from one of the stories? Yes sir, b'gosh. Now I've seen everything!

—Lin Carter,
1734 So. Newark St.
St. Petersburg, Fla.

(You do us too much honor, Mr Carter. Back in the "old days", the covers on science fiction magazines, by Frank P. Paul, H. W. Wernio, Leo Morey, and others, usually were faithful illustrations of a story in the book. I always thought it was a good idea. So, you see our cover wasn't quite so revolutionary—although some thought it revolting. As usual, though, there was such a diversity of opinion on the cover—without a clear-cut majority—that it's a moot point as to precisely what type of covers sells the magazines best.

(RWL)

Dear Editor:—

If it hadn't been for Judith Merril's story, "Barrier of Dread", this letter would never have been written. I don't

[Turn Page]

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usually feel moved to praise or criticize a story, whether good or bad, but *that*, sir was a work of art and deserves praise. Merrill will go places in this racket. The story had a worthy theme; the characters were more than just sketched in; and the writing itself was polished and well done. As is so often the case, the short stories in *Future* are better than the feature-length novels.

"Earth Needs a Killer" wasn't up to par with the others at all. Old, worn-out theme, poorly written I doubt if "space" would "whisper" against the skin of a cruiser (page 12) or that it would be audible above rocketfire if it did. Never did finish reading that story and never will. But the others were well worth fifteen cents, and more. On the whole, *Future* is an effort which deserves applause. Low price; generally high quality of material. The art-work, too, is well above average, especially Lawrence's. Unfortunately, Luros, by comparison with Finlay and Lawrence, does not show up well. Luros' art, like the work of some science-fiction authors, is hackneyed, stereotyped, or whatever you call old, run-of-the-mill stuff. Straight out of Buck Rogers.

"Shadows of Empire", after the tradition of the Chinese play, left perhaps too much to the imagination, but it was a good story, just the same. "Be Young Again" was amusing and lively, quite up to the standards you seem to have set for your magazine, which is saying a lot for the story.

"Martians Keep Out" suffered by comparison with the others. I dislike Bug-Eyed Monsters in science fiction. Probably the average reader is perfectly capable of dreaming up his own gargoyles, gremlins, and Hydra-headed monstrosities when in his cups. I believe that an author who has to resort to Bug-Eyed Monsters and spider-legged people, etc., in order to get across the atmosphere of futurity demonstrates a lack of imagination rather than exercise of it. Perhaps the average science-fiction reader would prefer to encounter strong hints of likelihood in his visions of the future. Fantasy in fiction can be delightful when it is not allowed to get out of hand, but you will remember that it is only the air of probability which makes fiction readable at all. Even fantastic fiction.

Nothing wonderful about "Two Worlds for One", but even it was a step in the

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right direction. Plot and action if only average, were at least neatly worked out; the double climax was pleasing, and—what do you know—the story even had a moral to it.

What matters most to me is this. Someone said recently that science-fiction is on its way to becoming literature. I hope the suggestion is not laughable—because I really believe that. And I believe that *Future* is making a very worthwhile contribution to that end.

—Allan Paul Sterger,
12314 Beachwood Ave.,
Cleveland 5, Ohio

(Seems most likely that if "life" exists on other planets, the forms it takes will look rather monstrous to our eyes, though not necessarily bug-eyedly monstrous. You don't expect anthropomorphic life-forms on Mars, Venus, etc., do you?)

In reference to requests for fan magazine reviews, larger departments, etc., we feel as the March Hare and the Mad Hatter did when Alice appeared—except of course, there was plenty of room at the tea table.

Again, our thanks to those who wrote in, and those who filled out coupons. Only fair to note that all the comments received on the July issue were not as complimentary as the letters in this issue. But most of the pointed misses came via the Preference Coupons, rather than in comment-at-length. Everything's being counted, however, in the final totting-up. (RWL)

RATINGS on the JULY ISSUE

1. Be Young Again	3.12
2. Martians, Keep Out!	3.39
3. Shadows of Empire	3.42
4. Barrier of Dread	3.67
5. Earth Needs a Killer	3.87
6. Two Worlds for One	4.00

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From the BOOKSHELF

DOUBLEDAY has chosen, wisely, I think, not to merchandize Judith Merrill's "Shadow on the Hearth" as science fiction, even though the story deals with suburban life interrupted by atomic bombs. Just how much interest this will have for the general science fiction reader, I cannot guess, inasmuch as I am allergic to the "true confession" level of writing, which this is. I don't agree with the *New York Times* reviewer that Merrill takes the subject itself too lightly, although his remark that the story reads more like the account of an unpleasant picnic than a major catastrophe comes close to the mark. For the treatment is pretty much on the belly level, so that, after the bombs fall, it seems to go into an endless game of "Nausea, Nausea, Who's Got The Nausea?". With one exception, the characters are all presented on the soap-opera level of comprehension and sympathy—which, for me, makes them both unsympathetic and uninteresting. Such people very likely do exist in the "real world" but to try to treat the subject of atomic warfare on their level requires expert treatment (which Merrill has) and considerably ingenuity (also present) in a project not worth undertaking in the first place. Where the author deals with the radio reports of the bombing, the governmental approaches to the civilian population, and the civilian "protection" measures, the story becomes (momentarily) interesting, penetrating, and convincing. But, alas, this doesn't endure; soon we return into the "Darling...you're back!" slot. (Incidentally, that's exactly how the novel ends—slightly different orchestration, but the same theme.) A couple of details strike me as being fantastic: New York, apparently, is peppered with atom bombs; in the harbor, in the air, and on the ground—yet, believe it or not, there are survivors. The other, and far worse, is the bland announcement at the end of the book that the war is over; the (un-named) enemy has surrendered—within a few days.

On the whole, I'd say that "Shadow on the Hearth" is just the thing for your mother-in-law, maiden Aunt from Crabb Corners, or anyone who dotes on "John's Other Wife," etc. I doubt that it will make readers think, but there's plenty of vicarious regurgitation to be had for all, at \$3.00 the copy.

A more familiar approach to radioactive doom—future interplanetary variety—is to be found in Simon & Schuster's edition of "Seetee Shock", by Will Stewart—whom many science fiction readers recognize as Jack Williamson. This is a revised version of a novel that ran serially in *Attounding Science Fiction* in 1949, and I am conscious, in re-reading, of the care with which the author has re-worked the story. It is smoother, more carefully constructed, and a little less melodramatic than before, but I still find the suffering of the inevitable hero a deadly bore. The book sells for \$2.50.

After the smooth workmanship in the two volumes noted above, the writing in Fritz Leiber's "Gather Darkness" seems a bit rough, even somewhat grating, but I was aware of this for about four pages, no more. By that time, I had become so thoroughly engrossed in re-reading this superb tale of an ingenious future planetwide Theocracy and the pseudo-Witchcraft which is the underground, that I completely forgot such matters as style. I cannot say whether this version is a revision—it, too, originally appeared in *Attounding*—but I can decidedly say that I enjoyed every word of it the first time, and it was no let-down upon re-reading. Pellegrini & Cudahy are the publishers, and I would cheerfully have paid double the \$2.75 they ask for it had I not received a review copy gratis.

The same publishers have also sent me copies of "The Greater Trumps", by Charles Williams, and "Beyond Time and Space", a compendium of Science Fiction, by August W. Derleth. But these will have to wait until next time.

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